THE ACCIDENTAL RETENTION AGENTS: HOW STUDENT AFFAIRS CAN INFLUENCE STUDENT RETENTION BY UNDERSTANDING HOW KEY PLAYERS (I.E., FACULTY) PERCEIVE THEIR ROLE IN STUDENT SUCCESS AND RETENTION

by

Andrew John Stone

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STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL

The dissertation of **Andrew John Stone**

has been approved by the following supervisory committee members:

Amy Bergerson	, Chair	**1/28/2015** Date Approved
Mary Skorheim	, Member	**1/28/2015** Date Approved
Cori Groth	, Member	**1/28/2015** Date Approved
Maria Ledesma	, Member	**1/28/2015** Date Approved
Robert Reason	, Member	Date Approved

and by **Andrea Rorrer**, Chair/Dean of

the Department/College/School of **Educational Leadership and Policy**

and by David B. Kieda, Dean of The Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

Over the past 40 years significant research has attempted to understand what influences student retention and overall student success. As leaders/administrators and student affairs professionals at colleges and universities around the country have searched for new ways to improve retention, understanding how and where faculty fit in the student retention picture has received limited attention. This study investigates the motivation behind faculty approaches to teaching, specifically looking at how faculty perceive the role they play in student success and how they approach teaching in the classroom. By interviewing faculty about their understanding of student retention literature and examining what takes place in the classroom, this study sheds light on an aspect of student retention that is deserving of attention- how faculty understand their responsibility for retaining undergraduate students. This can be useful as campuses make decisions to improve student success.

This dissertation is dedicated to: Chelsea Stone, my incredible wife and best friend; without her this would never have been possible; to my patient and loving kids; and for a strong network of friends and family who never stopped encouraging me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Framing Student Retention in Higher Education

Understanding the motivation behind why faculty teach the way they do, and how certain teaching strategies improve college student retention and success, has benefits for individual students, institutions of higher education, and society at large. Completing college helps students gain valuable experience to improve their skill development, thereby increasing their opportunity for upward economic mobility (Perna, 2005). In addition, college degree attainment is "linked to long-term cognitive, social and economic benefits for individuals" (Kuh et al., 2008, p. 540). For the institution, the loss of revenue from high attrition can be damaging. The loss of even one student over several terms can lead to the loss of tens of thousands of dollars (Seidman, 2012). In addition, state and national rankings take retention into account when rating institutions of higher education. Further understanding of all aspects of factors that influence student success should demand the attention of higher education scholars and practitioners.

In 2004, the National Center for Education Statistics (2012) began tracking a cohort of students at the start of the fall semester. After 6 years, "approximately 56 percent of male and 61 percent of female first-time, full-time students completed their degree" (p. 108). Compared to the average completion in 2012, 58%, a similar

cohort of students who started college in 1996 completed in 2002 with an average graduation rate of 51% (Berkner, He, & Cataldi, 2002, p. 16). However, in the same NCES study, when considering students who transferred from their first institutions and completed a degree within 6 years at another institution, the completion percentage improved to 58%. Persistence to degree completion in higher education has experienced little to no increase over the past decade.

Completing college has personal and societal benefits for students and society at large. Personal benefits include an improved quality of life, increased earning potential, better family relationships, and an increased likelihood of involvement in the community (Baum & Payea, 2004; Perna, 2005). Research has found that "on average college graduates earn almost a million dollars more over the course of their working lives than those with only a high school diploma" (Pennington, 2004). Societal benefits include increased earning potential, economic sustainability, and a responsible citizenry. Kuh and colleagues (2008) suggested:

> A college degree has replaced the high school diploma as a mainstay of economic self-sufficiency and responsible citizenship. In addition, earning a bachelor's degree is linked to long-term cognitive, social, and economic benefits to individuals – benefits that are passed on to future generations, enhancing the quality of life of the families of college-educated persons, the communities in which they live, and the larger society. (p. 540)

In addition, researchers have found that the current trend of low completion and graduation may lead to a discrepancy between the number of jobs requiring postsecondary credentials and the availability of qualified individuals to fill them. In 1973, 72% of jobs in the United States required a high school diploma or less (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003). Conversely, additional research by Carnevale and Desrochers found that by 2018, 38% of jobs in the United States will require a high

school diploma or less. Similarly, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2008 32% of the adult population age 25-64 possessed a bachelor's degree or higher. Recent research has revealed that by 2018, 63% of the jobs in the United States will require some postsecondary training or credential (Georgetown University, 2010). In addition, the world economy has changed dramatically over the past 30 years. As the world economy continues to transform, postsecondary education credentials ensure that individuals and state economies will have the workforce skills necessary to meet the economic demands of the future. Because of the important responsibility facing postsecondary institutions and to ensure that states reach their intended completion goals, "Big Goal" policies have been adopted by many states and mandated on campuses (Stone, 2012).

State Goals to Improve Student Completion

To motivate the improvement of student success and completion and to help ensure student learning and an educated workforce, state and federal lawmakers have adopted college completion goals. In 2009, President Obama proposed the American Graduation Initiative, which was designed to produce the highest college graduation rate of any nation in the world by 2020. This federal initiative included four strategies to increase the number of college graduates by 2020: 1) Community College Challenge Fund funds will be used for improved articulation agreements with 4-year institutions and dual enrollment programs at the high school level to increase access to programs and persistence; 2) College Access and Completion Fund resources will be used to increase innovation and close achievement gaps; 3) funding to support facilities construction and renovation will be used for

community college renovation and construction; and, 4) the Online Skills Laboratory will develop free courses for high school and college career-oriented students. According to President Obama, "We have to make sure we are educating people for the new jobs of the 21st century" (United States Government). Essentially, President Obama has drawn attention to the need to increase the number of college graduates to meet the needs of a changing workplace.

In response to President Obama's goal to educate people for the new jobs of the 21st century, the Lumina Foundation and the Gates Foundation adopted goals to support increased degree completion by 2020. In 2010, the Lumina Foundation adopted the President's goals based on the understanding that in order to respond to the social and economic opportunities of the future, more individuals will need postsecondary credentials. "Current economic conditions have *only* made this priority more clear and more urgent, both for short-term economic recovery and long-term economic success" (Lumina Foundation, 2010). Improving student retention will ensure that individual and state economies are prepared to meet future economic expectations.

Although several studies have uncovered the need to improve retention and completion, after decades of research focused on why students depart as well as what can be done to retain them, Tinto (1997) was surprised to find "that the classroom has not played a more central role in current theories of student persistence" (p. 599). Tinto was concerned that very few researchers have explored how the classroom shapes student persistence. Over the next decade significant research was conducted to better understand the role of student learning and

faculty in retaining students (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1997; Braxton, 2000; and Chang, 2005). Tinto (2006) later suggested, "The classroom is, for many students, the one place, perhaps only place, where they meet each other and the faculty. If involvement does not occur there, it is unlikely to occur elsewhere" (p. 4). Faculty and the classroom provide an ideal venue for ensuring that students connect to the learning process, other students, and the faculty (Weaver & Qi, 2005). Such experiences in the classroom, facilitated by faculty focused on teaching and learning a special impact on me as a student.

Personal Reflection

As I think back on my experience as an undergraduate student, I recall an underprepared, unmotivated, and nervous freshman walking into my first college course. After 4 months of nervously stammering through my courses I stared at my report card in disgust as I examined the variety of letters following each course title. I committed to improving myself for the next semester! I nervously, but with more enthusiasm, set out on the next semester of college. After 4 months of floundering through projects and assignments, I relived the same experience of staring at the less than admirable grades on my report card.

For a moment I considered following my friends to the workforce, but decided instead to give myself one more semester. Fortunately for me, in my third semester I met the first instructor who expressed an explicit interest in my success as a student. Throughout the semester he demanded accountability and hard work. Because he knew my name, I never missed a class. Because he talked to me about my grades on each assignment, I knew I had to try harder to improve my scores. He

required that we meet in groups outside of class to network with our peers and improve the preservation of information between classes. By expecting classroom participation, incorporating group work, and clearly explaining expectations, this faculty member took a page directly from Tinto (1975) and Astin (1984). He had his finger on the pulse of how to develop his teaching and curriculum to assist underprepared, unmotivated, and nervous students.

When considering what made the difference for me in college, I can visualize two or three faculty members who taught in a way that inspired commitment and motivation when I could have easily dropped out numerous times over the course of my freshman year. When I think about the factors that made the difference in my persistence and success, the overwhelming influence was that of effective faculty and quality classroom experiences.

My personal experience motivated the purpose and goal for this study—to contribute to a deeper understanding of how student retention research and theories are understood, internalized, and processed by college faculty. From my own experiences in general education and traditional first-year courses, this study is intentionally focused on faculty teaching general education courses. I recognize the extensive landscape of retention literature, including the many personal, institutional, and environmental factors that impact students. Investigating the specific individual and institutional elements of student success are beyond the scope of this study. Although the literature review provides a thorough exploration of research and theory related to retention, this study and its outcomes focus narrowly on how faculty understand, interpret, and implement retention practices

in the classroom. The study's findings should inform practice and policy discussions related to institutional initiatives intended to improve student success and retention by focusing on students' experiences with faculty and the classroom.

Research Problem

Although the findings of numerous studies have acknowledged the positive contributions of faculty in retaining students (Berger & Milem, 1999; Chang, 2005; Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Schreiner et al., 2011; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005) the research has not been clear about how faculty approach teaching with a specific focus on improving learning by incorporating teaching best practices in the classroom. For example, Pascarella, Terenzini, and Hibel (1978) suggested that interactions with faculty are an important facet of the college experience but that too few faculty facilitate these interactions (p. 450). More recently, student engagement in educationally purposeful activities including interacting with faculty and student peers was found to have an impact on first-year student success for those who entered college with lower levels of academic achievement (Kuh et al., 2008, p. 549). As students interact with faculty they become more comfortable in an academic environment thereby increasing their "sense of belonging" (Kuh & Hu, 2001, p. 310) with the institution. An important step to better understanding how to improve student retention and overall student success at institutions of higher education is to understand how faculty view their role in influencing students' experiences in the classroom.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation study is to investigate the motivation behind how faculty approach teaching, specifically looking at how faculty perceive the role they play in impacting student experiences to improve learning and retention and how they approach teaching in the classroom. According to Kuh (2003), "what is clear is that student-faculty interaction matters most to learning when it encourages students to devote greater effort to other educationally purposeful activities during college" (p. 29). Astin (1993) concluded that when students are actively engaged in their college experiences, (i.e., student learning and quality undergraduate experiences) retention improves. Interactions between faculty and students may occur in the classroom or outside of the classroom. Tinto (2006, p.7) suggested that if faculty attend to the task of "focusing on their actions" (i.e., pedagogy, grading, active learning, attendance, feedback, support, etc.) student retention and overall success will improve. If it is true that faculty play an important role in influencing student experiences through their teaching and interactions with students, it is especially important to understand how faculty respond to the suggestions proposed by Tinto (2006) and others (Astin, 1993; Kuh & Hu, 2001; & Umbach, & Wawrzynski, 2005). This study asked faculty about their approach to teaching, what influences their approach to teaching, and what motivates them to teach and interact with students in positive ways to improve student success. The findings of this research can inform student affairs', academic affairs', and future researchers' understanding of student retention by focusing deliberate attention on improving student success and retention by concentrating on what takes place in the

classroom.

Research Questions

To address the need for a clearer understanding of faculty perceptions of the role they play in retention, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. *What are faculty perceptions of their role in and responsibility for students' persistence decisions?*

   This was the most difficult question to answer. It has been nearly impossible to find any research that specifically investigated how faculty perceive their role in student retention. With limited research to build on, this study attempted to construct a foundation for future studies that involve faculty.

2. *Why do faculty members implement classroom strategies known to have a positive impact on student learning?*

   Understanding what works in the classroom is no longer a great mystery in education. After hundreds of studies, it is clear that active learning, instructional clarity, course organization, faculty preparedness, and feedback matter (Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt, 2008). Nevertheless, investigations of whether these strategies are actually used in the classroom are rare. This study sheds light on the activities that faculty utilize in the classroom and the motivations behind their actions.

Definition of Terms

- Student retention: Continuous enrollment of students, usually from fall to fall re-enrollment (Braxton, Brier, Steele, 2008, p.378).
- Student persistence: The desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from the beginning year through degree completion (Berger & Lyons, 2005, p. 7). According to Hagedorn (2012), the National Center for Educational Statistics states that institutions *retain* and students *persist* (p. 85).
- Student departure: Departure decisions made by students to voluntarily leave their college or university (Braxton, Brier, Steele, 2008, p. 378).
- Student attrition*:* A reduction in the number of students attending a given college or university because of lower student retention (Braxton, Brier, Steele, 2005, p. 378).
- Student involvement: The amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience (Astin, 1985, p. 36).
- Social integration: Normative and structural integration into social systems (i.e., involvement with student clubs and other student organizations) that leads to new levels of commitment (Tinto, 1975, p. 96).
- Academic integration: A student's experience with the academic systems and academic communities (i.e., interactions with faculty and students in the classroom) of a college or university (Braxton, Milem, & Shaw-Sullivan, 2000, p. 571).

Significance

The majority of existing literature focused on determining what strategies are most important to student retention, often from the perspective of students. In 2010, one study of the role of faculty and student interaction in student achievement found that although faculty play a crucial role in student achievement, research exploring the faculty perspective was needed (Komarraju, Muliskin, & Bhattacharya, 2010). Komarraju et al. (2010) encouraged further investigation of "how faculty members view their interactions with students and what they find enjoyable and beneficial from such relationships" (p. 340). This study explored how faculty view their role in influencing student learning experiences and what motivates faculty teaching approaches and other actions. What happens in the classroom has direct influence on student persistence decisions and their overall satisfaction with their education (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Understanding how faculty approach their teaching in an effort to improve student learning and success will provide valuable data and information for improving student experiences.

Given the purpose of this study, a qualitative research methodology was appropriate. Considering the importance of understanding the human experience and institutional expectations of faculty, the narrative approach to qualitative research was the most effective research method for this process. As Marshall and Rossman (2006) described, "it is essential to know how people define their situations" (p. 55). Interacting directly with faculty through interviews provided a

means for understanding their lived experience of interacting with students both in and out of the classroom.

The University of Utah provided an ideal setting for this study because of the recent excitement surrounding the inauguration of the 15th President, David Pershing. Over the last 2 years the University has focused on developing the "New U Student Experience" to "Strengthen the University, transform the lives of individuals, and leverage the resources of the University to impact local and global communities" (University of Utah, 2012b). At the conclusion of multiple conversations with the campus community a vision for undergraduate education was adopted by the President. The vision focuses on three principle goals for teaching, research, and service: 1) fostering innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship, and knowledge/technology transfer, 2) protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment, and 3) engaging communities locally as well as globally (University of Utah, 2012b). The first of seven core commitments that lead to the achievement of these three goals is student success and engagement. The University's commitment document states, "The New U offers students the opportunities to realize their full potential and flourish by providing strong academic, co-curricular, and high-impact programs along with advising for successful navigation through the system to identify and achieve their goals" (University of Utah, 2012b). One strategy for accomplishing commitment number one is "Re-imagine Undergraduate Education." Over the coming years, President Pershing and academic affairs will lead the campus to accomplish its strategic plan. With the University's strong focus on student success and engagement through

transforming undergraduate education, the findings of this study can provide valuable information to inform decision makers about how faculty can better contribute to the New U Student Experience.

It is not fair to imply that faculty hold all responsibility for the success of students. Improving the persistence of students is such a large issue that no single department or division should be assigned sole ownership (Braunstein & McGrath, 1997). For decades, student affairs programs have generally held the responsibility for improving student experiences and success. Now is the time to look at the largest division on campus, academic affairs, for support. Through shared understanding, institutions may be able to develop institutional strategies to improve student success and ultimately increase retention.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Retention may be one of the most recognizable terms in higher education. "More than 1,700 student retention references can be found at the reference link on the Center for the Study of College Student Retention website" (Morrison & Silverman, 2012, p. 61). At many campuses the term can be heard daily, as student affairs professionals discuss strategies to reduce the number of students leaving the institution. College and university presidents, vice presidents, and other executive team members are concerned with retaining students to improve accountability, state funding, and national prestige (Titus, 2004). With national student retention rates hovering at or around 50% (Berkner, He, & Cataldi, 2002, p. 16), everyone on campus plays a role in reducing student departure (Braxton, Brier, & Steele, 2008, p. 393). At the same time, little is known about whether faculty contemplate how to improve the persistence of students in the classroom, or even how they think about the influence of their teaching on learning. Although the responsibility for retaining students rests with everyone on campus, faculty have the unique opportunity to interact with students on a consistent basis in a predetermined location where they (faculty) determine the curriculum. This study focused specifically on how faculty approach teaching and thereby, contribute positively to the learning experience of students in the classroom.

What Is Student Retention?

Retention is frequently defined as the act of students continuing their higher education pursuits from the first to the second year. Hagedorn (2006) defined retention as "the measure of the proportion of students who remain enrolled at the *same* institution from year to year" (p. 91). Given that students interact with faculty throughout their entire college experience, this study considers retention not only from year 1 to year 2, but also from year 1 to college completion and graduation. Students may leave college for a variety of individual and institutional reasons including: "change of major, lack of money, family demands, and poor psycho-social fit" (Kuh et al., 2008, p. 541). According to Kuh et al. student departure is the result of a combination of personal and institutional attributes and experiences that do not favor the student. It is important for researchers to understand why students leave and to understand the institutional characteristics and contexts that factor into student retention (Titus, 2004).

Students depart from college for numerous reasons broadly categorized under academic failure and voluntary withdrawal. Tinto (1975) noted several reasons for voluntary withdrawal including family background and individual characteristics (i.e., high school performance, standardized test scores, past educational experiences, and goal commitment). Academic failure is self-explanatory; students withdraw because they do not make adequate academic progress. This study did not investigate individual aspects of student departure or retention.

What We Know

Over the past 50 years researchers have devoted considerable attention to understanding the how, what, where, and why of student retention (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Researchers have investigated student retention from various angles including: student involvement, staff support, faculty interaction, campus climate, and financial aid. One of the earliest studies (McNeely, 1937) focused on factors that contributed to student departure decisions. According to McNeely, *student mortality* (i.e., students' failure to remain in college until graduation) was higher at public institutions versus private, was higher for women compared to men, and was higher for freshman. Additionally, McNeely (1937) found financial complications to be factors in students' departure decisions. Interestingly, the same factors that significantly contribute to student departure in the 21st century also influenced student departure almost 75 years ago.

Sense of Belonging

One thoroughly studied aspect of student retention is the overall sense of belonging students feel on campus. Sense of belonging has been defined as a students' psychological sense of identification and affiliation with the campus community (Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009). Building upon Astin (1984) and Tinto's (1973) models of student involvement and integration, a student develops a sense of belonging through involvement in social and academic environments across campus. Lack of a sense of belonging on campus may lead to student departure because students lack a connection to the institution (Morrow & Ackerman, 2012). One factor in the development of a strong sense of belonging on

campus that is noted in previous research is faculty and the classroom (Kuh & Hu, 2001).

Student Characteristics

Students enter college with a diverse range of previous experiences and skills that immediately influence how they respond to other students, faculty, and the classroom. Individual characteristics such as family background, socio-economic status, academic ability, race and gender, high school academic achievement, and parental education level (Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000) determine students' commitment to the institution and graduation. Institutional commitment is defined as "the commitment of a student to their college or university, developed after enrollment," which leads to increased likelihood of retention (Jones, 2010, p. 687). Pascarella, Seifert, and Whitt (2008) also found that parents' degree attainment played a significant role in students' individual commitment to persistence. Teaching styles as well as the overall conduct of faculty have significant influence on the development and maintenance of institutional commitment (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011).

Pascarella, Seifert, and Whitt (2008) suggested that students' experiences with faculty in the classroom, including exposure to effective classroom instruction, impact student persistence decisions. They attempted to shed light on the effects of student exposure to effective instruction and resulting influences on student persistence and success. Student persistence to the second year of college is a result of "exposure to effective classroom instruction" and "other college experiences" (Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt, 2008, p. 58) such as involvement. My study focused on

the second effect (i.e., what takes place in the classroom) and how faculty fit into this model. Interviews and observations sought to understand what faculty do in the classroom that impacts student retention and success.

As described above, students enter higher education with significantly different background experiences. Considering this, Pascarella, Siefert, and Whitt (2008) found that exposure to effective classroom instruction and involvement out of class can lead to greater student retention. Additionally, Johnson et al. (2007) suggested that institutions adapt to meet the changing needs of students from diverse backgrounds. Further discussion of involvement outside the classroom and exposure to effective instruction and interaction with faculty is found later in this chapter.

Effective instruction and interactions between faculty and students can influence student persistence decisions and success. Examples of effective instruction include teaching organization and clarity (Pascarella, Salisbury, & Blaich, 2011), providing clear expectations to students (Slate et al., 2011), and developing an engaging and interactive classroom (Smith & Cardaciotto, 2011). What happens in the classroom has direct influence on student persistence decisions and their overall satisfaction with their education (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). My study explored how faculty participants approach teaching in order to improve the learning experience of students, thereby impacting student success. The findings from this study add to the existing literature which has found that students are more likely to succeed when they are actively engaged inside and outside of the classroom (Astin, 1984; Kuh et al., 1991; Tinto, 1993).

Student Involvement Theory

Student involvement as a strategy to improve student retention has a long history in higher education. Alexander Astin (1984) suggested that "student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 297). Involvement activities can take place in the classroom with faculty or outside of the classroom through interactions with other students or campus administrators, and include classroom interactions, involvement with on-campus clubs, intramural sports, work on campus, and service learning. In addition to involvement around campus, Astin (1999) suggested that frequent interaction with faculty leads students to express increased satisfaction with their institutional experience.

As a complement to Astin's concept of "involvement," researchers have suggested additional involvement and integration models. First, Tinto (1993) developed an integration model of college student persistence and advocated for socialization processes that encourage students to integrate into institutional academic and social systems. He suggested that one thing we know about persistence is that "involvement matters" (Tinto, 1997, p. 600). Tinto (1997) further argued that academic and social integration influence persistence differently for different students. Individuals are more likely to persist when both types of integration occur. Second, Braxton and McClendon (2001) proposed that "social integration positively influences subsequent institutional commitment (commitment formed after enrollment), and subsequent institutional commitment, in turn, positively affects persistence in college" (p. 57). Overall, an institution that

invests in student integration by providing students with opportunities to connect to campus provides the best environment for student learning, development, and retention (Kuh et al., 1991). This study focuses on integration as it occurs in the classroom through group work and discussion with other students and the faculty member.

Faculty Role in Student Retention

A commonly noted finding in student retention research is the important role faculty and the classroom play in improving student learning, persistence, and retention (Astin, 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella, 2001; & Tinto, 1975). Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) found that "students report higher levels of engagement and learning at institutions where faculty members use active and collaborative learning techniques, engage students, emphasize higher-order cognitive activities, interact with students and value enriching educational experiences" (p. 2). The classroom offers an ideal setting for improving the persistence of students. Numerous studies have found that teaching styles, curriculum development, and classroom climate play a crucial role in determining whether or not a student decides to continue their postsecondary education pursuits (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Braxton, 2008; Chang, 2005; Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt, 2008; Schreiner, 2011).

Optimal teaching styles and curriculum development include the incorporation of group work in the classroom and the development of learning communities and service learning (Bean & Eaton, 2001). Teaching practices, including encouraging students to interact with one another, provide cues to

students about how responsive faculty are to interactions inside and outside the classroom (Cotton & Wilson, 2006). Faculty can demonstrate optimal teaching styles by "implementing active learning practices—class discussion and higher-order thinking activities—in their teaching" (Braxton & McClendon, 2001, p. 63). Each of these strategies requires professors to develop skills beyond the traditional teaching model of standing in the front of the room and lecturing students.

These findings are helpful for faculty and departments interested in improving student success and learning. Given the overwhelming research supporting the role of faculty in positively impacting student experiences through interactions both in and out of the classroom, this study fills a void by specifically linking these research findings with faculty awareness of their role in and application of strategies that promote student success.

Research suggests that faculty and staff play an important role in building a positive campus climate, promoting engagement, and valuing diversity (Astin, 1993; Bean & Eaton, 2001; Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt 2008). Faculty set the tone for the institution: one study found that "faculty and staff interactions with students may be predictive of student learning because of the expectations conveyed to students about their ability to succeed—a self-fulfilling prophecy that influences students to achieve in ways that confirm those expectations" (Tauber, 1997; as cited in Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004, p. 550). Successful student integration is significantly influenced by "favorable daily interactions between faculty and staff" (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005, p. 6). Faculty and staff play an important role in explaining and demonstrating institutional values and expectations (Kuh et al., 2008). This should

be done early and frequently, in the classroom and outside of the classroom and on a consistent basis, beginning with faculty involvement in new student orientation and ongoing through each meeting with campus staff and in the classroom with faculty members. Tinto (1997) suggested that academic integration is the most important because the classroom allows students to develop a "network of support—a small supportive community of supporters—that helps bond students to the broader social communities of the college" (p. 613). Although academic involvement may be most beneficial, Tinto further suggested "that the manner in which social and academic involvements (integration) shape learning and persistence will vary over the course of the college career and do so in differing ways for different students inside and outside the classroom" (p. 617).

Teaching and Effective Instruction

Recent research and findings related to effective teaching and instruction to promote student success found that less passive approaches to teaching including active learning are more effective for promoting learning for college age students (Richards & Velasquez, 2014). Additionally, interactive and team-based learning that promotes group work and engages students in their education improves educational outcomes (Michaelsen, Davidson, & Major, 2014). Not only are educational outcomes improved by developing an interactive classroom, but faculty are more interested in teaching courses that are interactive and engaging (Kenney & Banerjee, 2011). Involving students in the classroom and promoting discussions helps students invest in their education and create networks of peers that compromise a support network with faculty and peers (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1997;

Komarraju, Musulki, & Bhattacharya, 2010). Communicating effectively by keeping their finger on the pulse of learning in their classroom makes faculty more likely to modify their teaching approaches to improve student success (Yoo, Schallert, & Svinicki, 2013). How faculty approach teaching and instruction impacts student learning and the overall success of students (Pascarella, Siefert, & Whitt, 2008). Because of this and other research findings, it is important to understand how faculty perceive their role in student retention and how that influences their approach to teaching to promote student success.

The classroom is the "common" experience that all college students, regardless of background or extra-curricular requirements, encounter (Tinto, 1997). In the classroom, students benefit most directly from faculty interactions; after class they benefit more directly through co-curricular work (Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996). A 1999 Berger and Milem longitudinal study of freshman students at a private university found that involvement with faculty was a significant predictor of academic integration, institutional commitment, and overall persistence. Students who interact with faculty have a greater opportunity to connect with the campus through those faculty and their classrooms (Nora & Crisp, 2012). The research clearly indicates that in order to improve learning and success, faculty need to understand the important role they play in positively or negatively impacting the experiences of students.

Faculty Teaching and Motivation

Understanding the role faculty play in student is facilitated by recognizing the factors that influence faculty teaching and motivation. Surprisingly, there is

little research that looks specifically at what influences faculty and motivates them to be good teachers. Although the research is limited, what has been done sheds light on many factors that influence faculty teaching including: physical space, different types of courses, department and campus leadership, campus environment, faculty personality and experience (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Jones, 2008; Lechuga & Lechuga, 2012; Marston, 2010; McCrickerd, 2012; Terpstra, & Honoree, 2009; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). The idea of motivation is so broad that several definitions apply to higher education faculty. Blackburn and Lawrence (1995) defined motivation as "the tendency to initiate and sustain a given activity" (p. 18). The factors that motivate faculty to initiate or sustain an approach to teaching are broad and diverse. However, reward structure, support, research, and student learning have been found to motivate faculty teaching approaches (Feldman & Paulsen, 1999).

Institutional reward structure, (i.e., tenure and promotion) motivates faculty to change their behavior and improve teaching (McCrickerd, 2012). However, according to one study, the current tenure and promotion structure does not put enough emphasis on teaching (Lechuga & Lechuga, 2012). Rather, reward structures at colleges and universities are likely to reward research and publications more than teaching (Lechuga & Lechuga, 2012). Emphasizing research and publishing over teaching provides challenges to motivating high-quality faculty teaching.

Time and experience as a faculty member influence how faculty see their role as educators. "Faculty admit that most of their knowledge about students'

understanding came from experience—their experience as teachers, their experience as students, and occasionally the experience of senior colleagues" (Lenze & Dinham, 1999, p. 160). During their time as a teacher, faculty learn and develop skills that influence their approach to teaching. The motivation to be an effective teacher shifts and changes with more experience. Weimer (2006) suggested that "many [faculty] teach from habit, blind to the premises and assumptions that ground the practices they routinely use" (p. 9), learning through successes and failures as they develop teaching habits that work with their style and motivation. After years of teaching, many faculty may acknowledge that good teaching likely falls into the elusive category of "I can't define it, but I know it when I see it" (Jones, 2008, p. 95).

With a reward structure that emphasizes research, faculty may focus on research more than teaching. Knapper (1995) suggested that "most faculty have been trained as researchers in their discipline but have had no background in educational or pedagogical theory" (p. 60). Limited training opportunities exist to help new or experienced faculty learn to teach effectively. Many faculty may have pursued a faculty career because of their desire to be successful researchers. Knapper (1995) added that although faculty are trained to be researchers, "many faculty lack a sophisticated conceptual understanding of how learning takes place in college students" (p. 60). Understanding how learning occurs and the factors that influence student learning helps faculty become better teachers. Although research has a significant role in academia, "it is also important that all faculty engage in teaching, mentoring, and service and administrative work for the institution" (Misra,

Lundquist & Templer, 2012, p. 319). Collaboration and interactions with students, colleagues, and others across campus can improve the overall teaching and scholarship of faculty (Jones, 2008).

A 2010 study of college, high school, and elementary faculty found that "all three levels of teachers identified professional satisfaction factors (e.g., satisfaction in working with students and seeing them learn, joy in teaching one's subject, etc.) as the most powerful motivators in their decision to remain in the classroom" (Martson, 2010, p. 445). Working with students and facilitating their learning is a consistent motivation for faculty to be better educators. Faculty do what they believe they are good at; they devote energy to what interests them, and they engage in activities where they can influence outcomes (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995, p. 281). A personal, departmental, and institutional focus on student learning can influence faculty to devote additional energy to developing an approach to teaching that improves student learning and overall success (Feldman & Paulsen, 1999). The role of faculty is important to understand, and this study sheds light that role.

Role of Faculty—Teaching in Higher Education

Higher education institutions have changed over the past 100 years (Kezar & Sam, 2013). In the early 1900s faculty were responsible for scheduling, recruiting, admissions, registration, and teaching. Today, faculty are responsible for teaching, publishing, curriculum development, advising, research, on-campus service, and other responsibilities (SIGCSE, 2011), although teaching is the most prominent use of faculty time. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2004)

faculty reported spending 70% of their time on instruction; faculty reported 9.6 hours per week teaching credit-bearing classes (NCES, 2004).

In addition to teaching, faculty may engage in other activities on a daily basis. The American Association of University Professors (2013) suggested that if one followed higher education faculty around for a day they would observe engagement in many of the following activities:

- Helping students with subject matter in person, by e-mail, or by way of an electronic bulletin board
- Working with colleagues to modify the curriculum to keep up with changes in the discipline
- Coaching students who want to go beyond the required coursework in a class, or counseling students about personal problems, learning difficulties, or life choices
- Serving on a committee interviewing candidates for new faculty positions
- Evaluating a colleague's work for promotion or tenure, or participating in a departmental self-study
- Participating in the activities of a professional association to advance standards and research in the field
- Making a scholarly presentation at a disciplinary society meeting
- Presenting to a business or school group, often at no expense to the group
- Providing professional advice to local, state, or national government
- Keeping the public informed about issues by talking to the media
- Serving on the boards of local, state, or national groups

It is clear that higher education faculty have an extensive set of responsibilities and expectations.

In addition to the list above, publishing and service require faculty attention and energy. Many faculty and staff in higher education are familiar with the phrase "publish or perish." The fundamental question at Research I institutions centers on whether the rewards are greater for publishing or teaching. A 1984 study found that research and teaching are "weighted differently (in promotion/tenure decisions), depending on the market segment in which the institution operates" (Boyes, Happel, & Hogan, 1984, p. 140). The University of Utah operates as a research institution which means the decisive factor in faculty tenure and promotion decisions is research (Tang & Chamberlin, 2003). Research and the publication of scholarly work requires significant attention from faculty. Dr. Ann Austin, Director of the Global Institute for Higher Education noted: "writing; submitting one's work for scrutiny through the process of peer review; and making one's research, interpretations, and the ideas available for public consideration by publishing one's work" is essential for faculty development and advancement (Vance, 2010, p. 22). The reality is that faculty teaching at Research I institutions, such as the University of Utah, are expected to conduct research and publish their findings. Rank advancement and tenure and promotion depend on it. With this focus on publishing, it is possible that faculty may devote less time and energy to teaching (Terpstra & Honoree, 2009).

Faculty teaching at 4-year colleges and universities engage in activities such as teaching, research, and service (Terpstra & Honoree, 2009). Service on a college

campus can include coaching students, serving on hiring committees, consulting, working on campus committees, and evaluating scholarly work (AAUP, 2013). Like research, service on campus is used to determine rank and promotion for faculty members (Tang & Chamberlin, 2003). Researchers have found that research and publication offer the biggest potential reward for faculty efforts: "service and teaching are undervalued relative to research" at certain institutions (Antonio, Astin, & Cress, 2000, p. 388). Although teaching, service, and publishing are expected of all faculty, with limited time it may be difficult for faculty to juggle these numerous responsibilities.

Contract or Contingent Faculty

Contract, contingent faculty "includes part and full-time faculty who are appointed off the tenure track" (AAUP, 2003). Contingent faculty do not hold governing responsibilities, do not vote in college and department elections, and are not involved in evaluation of tenured and tenure-track faculty (AAUP, 2012). The role of faculty teaching in higher education may be different for faculty who are not on a tenure track but are contracted to teach a certain number of classes for a set period of time. Unless stipulated in the contract, many contract faculty are required to teach and that is all (AAUP, 2014). Often they are not expected to participate in professional development or department training and they lack office space or support services in the department, which may pose challenges to working with students outside of the classroom (Kezar & Maxey, 2013). However, research has found that full-time contract faculty, as opposed to part-time contract faculty, approach teaching similar to tenured and tenure track faculty colleagues (Baldwin &

Wawrzynski, 2011). Additionally, Umbach (2007) found that "contingent (contract) faculty are as effective—and in some cases, more effective—in delivering instruction when compared with their tenured or tenure-track counterparts" (p. 92). This finding is promising for the contract faculty in this study because of previous research, which found that higher levels of learning positively impact student retention (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Looking towards the future, this is important because the number of tenure track teaching positions is declining as institutions rely more heavily on cost savings through hiring contract faculty (American Association of University Professors, 2005, p.25). Given this anticipated increase, it is important for colleges and universities to ensure that contract faculty are provided with the necessary resources to support effective teaching as well as opportunities for interactions with students.

Teaching in Utah Higher Education

Locally, the Utah State Board of Regents has adopted faculty workload guidelines, (Regent policy 485, USHE, 1998). According to this policy, faculty teaching at the University of Utah are expected to carry 9 credit-hour teaching loads each semester. Faculty contact hours in credit bearing teaching activities average approximately 10 hours per week. In comparison, faculty teaching at regional universities in Utah are expected to carry 12 credit-hour teaching loads and at state community colleges 15 credits each semester.

Based on the Utah State Board of Regents policy faculty teaching at the University of Utah are expected to carry approximately three courses a semester while also maintaining the duties to students outlined in University Policy 6-316:

Code of Faculty Rights and Responsibilities (2010). According to this policy faculty members are expected to meet with regularly scheduled classes, engage in reasonable and substantial preparation for teaching, maintain regular office hours, provide requirements and expectations to students at the beginning of the course, and refrain from using the classroom for the presentation of their own ideas. In addition, "faculty members must completely perform their responsibilities as teachers and members of the faculty with relevant college or departmental criteria" (Faculty Code, 2010). It should be noted that nowhere in the Board of Regents or University Policy does it outline specific emphases or strategies that can or should be utilized in the classroom. Faculty have autonomy to prepare for and teach their courses in accordance with their own ideas and strategies.

Literature Specific to the Research Questions

At this point it is helpful to specifically describe the current state of research regarding how faculty perceive their role in student retention and how they approach teaching to improve student success. Even after extensive study and focus from researchers, a gap still exists in this literature. It is still not clear what motivates faculty to be effective teachers. This gap guides the direction and methodology for this study.

Faculty Perceptions of the Role They Play in Student Retention

Faculty teaching at colleges and universities face an increasingly long list of responsibilities and expectations including teaching, publishing, service, curriculum development, and coaching and mentoring students (American Association of

University Professors, 2013). With so much to accomplish and a limited number of hours in the day, it may be unfair to expect faculty to be aware of the latest retention literature and apply best practices to their courses. In fact, according to Barefoot (2004), "Many, if not most, US higher education instructors in traditional academic disciplines are themselves essentially unaware of retention research" (p. 16). Tinto (2006) suggested that because of extensive responsibilities outside of the classroom and because retention is not a priority on campuses, faculty are not interested in student retention. "Student retention is not high on everyone's list of priorities, in particular that of the faculty" (Tinto, 2006, p. 9). With significant professional expectations inside and outside of the classroom, faculty may find it difficult to juggle so many responsibilities including additional priorities such as student retention.

Classroom Strategies that Positively Impact Student Retention

Numerous studies have uncovered what works in the classroom: active learning, outlining clear expectations, and prompt feedback (Braxton, Milem, & Shaw, 2000; Pascarella, Seifert, Whitt, 2008). Bonwell and Eison (1991) defined active learning as "any class activity that involves students in doing things and thinking about things they are doing" (as cited in Braxton, 2008, p. 71). Active and engaged learning is a teaching strategy that deliberately encourages students to actively participate in their education. Rather than a faculty member standing at the front of the classroom and disseminating knowledge to the class, active and engaged learning invites students to participate in the learning process thereby influencing their desire to persist. According to Braxton, Jones, Hirschy, and Hartley (2008)

"faculty use of active learning practices directly and indirectly affects college student departure decisions i.e., student retention" (p. 72). This is frequently accomplished through classroom discussion and group work. Kuh et al. (2008) found that students who engage in educationally purposeful activities including group work and classroom discussion were more likely to persist. Involving students in active learning requires faculty investment in the teaching and learning process that goes beyond that of lecturing and preparing curriculum.

In addition to promoting active learning, faculty members who clearly outline the expectations and outcomes for their courses can increase the persistence of students (Pascarella et al, 2008). Typically, this is done through clearly constructed and delivered course syllabi. Pascarella et al., (2008) found that

> Exposure to organized and clear instruction during the first year of college increases the likelihood that a student will be "very satisfied" with the undergraduate education he or she is receiving. In turn, this satisfaction has a net positive influence on the likelihood one will re-enroll for the second year of undergraduate education at an institution (p. 59).

Clearly outlining expectations and classroom policies and procedures (i.e., attendance, assignments and group work) helps students navigate and plan for their experience in the course. Throughout the Pascarella et al. study faculty were asked to discuss their expectations and rules for the class, as well as how and when faculty communicated these expectations to their students.

Numerous studies have found that teaching styles, curriculum development, and classroom climate play a crucial role in determining whether students persist in their postsecondary education pursuits (Astin, 1993; Bean & Eaton, 2001; Braxton, 2008; Chang, 2005; Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt

2008; Schreiner, 2011; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Overall, the consistent theme is that what happens in the classroom matters. Faculty may choose to implement several different strategies, but regardless of what works for their personal style, institutional type, or student experiences, the simple truth is that faculty should seek to actively involve students in the classroom.

In summary, significant research conducted over several decades shows that institutions will likely see improved success of students when interactions occur with faculty inside and outside of the classroom. What is still not fully understood is what motivates faculty to pursue such interactions and approach teaching in a way that improves the learning experiences for students, thereby impacting their desire to continue their education. This study sought to answer this question.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study was guided by previous research findings that supported the important role of faculty in retaining students. However, as Tinto (1997) argued, although it is evident that faculty and the classroom matter, most institutions have focused retention efforts "outside the classroom in the domain of student affairs" (p. 600). Thus, the focus of this study was to understand how faculty interpret and respond to research findings that support the idea that their teaching methods and classroom practices impact students' learning experiences and overall persistence decisions, and to understand how that knowledge influences their motivation and approach to teaching.

Research Method

To fully understand the lived experience of higher education faculty, a narrative analysis approach was utilized. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) "narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience" (p. 18). Interviews and narrative analysis are an effective means for discerning how faculty think and act on their ideas about the role they play in student retention. The method of narrative analysis gives the researcher the responsibility of analyzing how the speaker uses language in a sequence to tell a story (Riessman, 2008). In

addition, "narratives (stories) are related to the experience that people have of their lives… they are interpretive devices through which people represent themselves" (May, 2002, p. 242). My responsibility as the researcher is to draw "relation to events" (Wells, p. 5), to recognize and connect themes, from the experiences of the participants.

Through interviews and observations, the lived experiences of faculty developed my view of how they approach their teaching. Taken from the research design proposed by Seidman (2006), I utilized in-depth interviewing which combines a focus on life-history with an examination of participants' present lived experiences. Using this methodology placed the responsibility on me as the researcher to conduct the interviews in such a way that participants felt comfortable sharing their life experiences, by maintaining a strategy referred to as "active listening" (Wells, p. 26). Active listening requires that I give verbal and nonverbal feedback to the participant throughout the interview as they answer questions. I interviewed each faculty member two times to ensure I gathered the necessary information while also ensuring a timely data collection process for myself and the participants.

This study adopted the interview series proposed by Siedman (2006). In "focused life history" (p. 17), participants were asked to reflect on their lived experience as college students and their development as faculty members. Specific questions explored the lived experience of faculty as students. For example, participants were asked to recall what factors influenced their decision to pursue teaching including specific strategies used by their own professors that influenced

participants' teaching and curriculum development. Additional questions focused on the evolution of current teaching practices incorporated by participants in their courses.

"Details of experience" (Siedman, 2006, p. 19), the second phase of the interview, elaborated on the concrete details of the experiences described by participants. This portion of the interview allowed me to inquire about specific details based on participants' responses during the first interview. For example, if a participant mentioned a certain approach to teaching and then demonstrated a different approach during my observation, the second interview provided the opportunity to clarify and add to what I learned in the first interview and observation. The purpose was to reconstruct and expand on the myriad details described by participants through their specific experiences and stories.

Finally, in "reflection on the meaning" (Siedman, 2006, p. 18) participants made sense of and developed meaning from their lived experience and current practice. This stage of the interview connected the meaning between participants' individual histories and current details of their lived experiences. Each participant was asked to reflect on the life experiences that led them to teach at the University of Utah, the practices and pedagogies they use in the classroom and their interactions with students on a daily basis, and the factors that contributed to their use of these pedagogies and practices. Drawing connections between participants' previous experiences and how those experiences influenced their approach to teaching added significant depth to the interviews and findings by providing insight into the motivation behind their approach to teaching. Through narrative analysis

the lived experiences of participants shed valuable light on how they understand their role in college student success.

Study Context

This study was conducted at a 4-year, Research I institution considered the "flagship" state institution in Utah. The University of Utah has a student population (headcount) of 32,077, including graduate and undergraduate students (University of Utah, 2013). According to the University of Utah Office of Budget and Institutional Analysis (OBIA), the freshman class of 2013 consisted of 3,721 students. With over 1,500 full-time and adjunct faculty at the University of Utah, the opportunity to interview a variety of faculty was present.

With the inauguration of its 15th president, David Pershing, the University kicked off the New U Student Experience initiative to recognize a strategic advantage and vision for the institution. The goal of the New U Student Experience is to ensure that all students experience: a) seamless navigation through the system, b) support for student success, c) encouragement to be global citizens, d) integration of knowledge, e) community engagement and connections, f) respect for diversity and, g) planning to have an impact (University of Utah, 2013a). A central tenant of the New U Student Experience is that students are supported throughout their education and that knowledge is integrated across their educational experience.

The New U Student Experience vision guides the improvement of academic experiences for University of Utah undergraduate students. This initiative outlines the experiences students should have while at the university. During the first and

second year students are encouraged to get involved on campus and in the classroom. Typically, on college and university campuses, the first 2 years are the time when most students take general education courses and interact with faculty teaching those classes. The value of the first year is evidenced by an increased emphasis on first-year seminar programs in which small groups of first-year students engage in critical inquiry, writing, literacy, and collaborative learning (Kuh, 2008).

In 2009 the University of Utah's Undergraduate Council implemented a set of Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) adapted from the Liberal Education and America's Promise and endorsed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2013). Faculty are encouraged through campus initiatives to incorporate these learning outcomes into their courses to assist students in developing the following:

- Knowledge of human culture and the physical and natural world
- Intellectual and practical skills
- Personal and social responsibility
- Integrative learning

University of Utah faculty are encouraged to incorporate strategies that help students leave the classroom with greater knowledge and experience in one or more of these Essential Learning Outcomes.

The University of Utah is committed to improving teaching and learning in the classroom. The Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE) offers instructional resources in lesson planning, active learning, community and engaged

learning, and other teaching strategies. Specifically, active learning is described by CTLE as "a learning environment where the teachers and students are actively engaged with the content through discussions, problem-solving, critical thinking, debate or a host of other activities that promote interaction among learners, instructors and the material" (University of Utah-Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence, 2013b). The CTLE active learning definition suggests that faculty make deliberate efforts to involve students in applying what they learn in the classroom with peers and faculty. Previous research confirms the positive impact of active learning on student retention (Braxton, Hirschy, & Hartley, 2008). Institutional resources at the University of Utah are committed to providing faculty with tools for improving their teaching and incorporating strategies that impact students' persistence decisions. This commitment provided the ideal venue for conducting this study.

Faculty teaching at 4-year research universities have significant responsibilities connected to teaching, research, and service (Terpstra & Honoree, 2009). Because of this, expecting faculty to stay current on best teaching practices and incorporate them into their courses may be unrealistic. Research about how faculty perceive their responsibilities for student retention is not extensive. A study attempting to investigate whether faculty members accept their role in student retention needs to first understand the responsibilities and challenges faced by faculty at a flagship research institution. Conducting semistructured interviews provided the best opportunity to understand the "*how* of people's lives as well as the *whats*" (Fontana & Frey, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 62). To truly

understand how faculty internalize and think about student retention, it was important to understand the faculty world (i.e., their responsibilities for research, tenure, promotion, service, and scholarship). By asking participants about their past experiences, current practices, and the motivation behind how they do what they do, this study sheds light on how faculty understand their role in student retention and success.

Participants

Participants selected for this study were full-time tenured, tenure-track, or contract faculty teaching general education courses at the University of Utah. Participants represented a diverse range of age, experience, and gender. Each faculty member taught at least one first-year course in mathematics, communications, or history.

Faculty Participants

A total of 4 faculty members were interviewed. Participants included 2 female faculty members and 2 male faculty members. Participants represented the following departments: 2 faculty from the Department of Mathematics, 1 from the Department of Communication, and 1 from the Department of History. All participants were Caucasian and each participant had earned a Ph.D. in their respective field (see Table 1). The pseudonyms selected for participants are Dr. Jones, Dr. Smith, Dr. Taylor, and Dr. Meyers.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Faculty Participants

Name	Dept.	Years Teaching	Ed. Level	Race/ Ethnicity	Faculty Type
Dr. Jones	Math	3	Ph.D.	Caucasian	Contract
Dr. Smith	Math	8	Ph.D.	Caucasian	Tenure-track
Dr. Taylor	Comm.	8	Ph.D.	Caucasian	Contract
Dr. Meyers	History	20	Ph.D.	Caucasian	Tenured

Recruitment

Participants were recruited via an email (see Appendix A) sent from me to the department chairs of communications, math, English, biology, chemistry, ethnic studies, sociology, psychology, and history. Department chairs were informed that I was seeking faculty to participate in a study to learn more about how they respond to their role in student retention. I asked for the contact information of two to three faculty members from each department. Department chairs were encouraged to recommend faculty in their department who focus on engaging students in the classroom. I intentionally pursued faculty who had a demonstrated interest in classroom engagement because I wanted to talk with participants who might be motivated by student retention as illustrated by their teaching and conduct in the classroom.

Of the nine department chairs who were emailed, three responded and recommended a total of 11 potential participants. Each of the 11 potential participants was emailed (see Appendix B); six responded and four offered availability that matched the timeline for the study. I emailed each of the four potential participants to request an interview and observation in their classroom. This email included specific information regarding the purpose of the interview and observation and the anticipated study outcomes.

Data Collection

I utilized two data collection strategies to investigate how participants understand their role in retaining students. First, I interacted with them through individual interviews. Two interviews took place in the office of each faculty

member participant, each of which lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. The first interview took place at the beginning of my research process, and was followed by an observation in the classroom and then a final interview. The purpose of the interviews was to gain perspectives on how participants understand their role in retention and if/how they thoughtfully implement student retention practices in their courses. The second arm of my data collection process was observing participants' classroom teaching. In my teaching observations, I took notes on what I observed related to the teaching strategies used by participants in the classroom. Through each data collection method I hoped to obtain valuable data that would inform the findings of this study.

Semistructured Interviews

Interviewing is a strategy for obtaining information by listening to participants' descriptions of their experiences. The purpose of interviewing is to discover what is on someone's mind, considering all facets, in order to understand their perspective (Braustein & McGrath, 1997). Additionally, Braustein and McGrath suggested "interviewing enables researchers to find out those things which cannot be directly observed, such as assumptions and beliefs" (p. 201). Through the use of interviews the researcher has the opportunity to understand the world of the research participant. This was valuable for my study because faculty members live in a unique world that is often only understood by those who live, research, teach, and serve within academia.

Data collection for this study consisted of two semistructured interviews with 4 University of Utah faculty. Semistructured interviews allowed me to pose a

set of interview questions that flowed and changed throughout each interview (see Appendix F for interview questions). As Converse and Schuman (1974) described, "there is no single interview style that fits every occasion or all respondents" (p. 53). Each participant had different experiences and perceptions and was afforded the flexibility to shape the conversation. The purpose of the first interview was to get acquainted with participants and to have them reflect on their lived experience as a student and faculty member to discover the motivation behind their desire to teach at the university level. Following the observation, the second interview provided the opportunity to clarify specific details and draw connections between the first interview and classroom observation.

Following the first interview and observation, 1 faculty participant (Dr. Jones) was unable to participate in the second interview, despite significant attempts to schedule it. This has an obvious impact on my study because the opportunity to ask clarifying questions from the first interview and observation was lost. However, the data gathered from the first interview and observation provided useful information regarding how Dr. Jones perceived his role in retaining students.

Interviews were recorded using a digital recording device. The recorded interviews were saved as individual files and I transcribed all interviews verbatim. All recorded files and transcribed interviews were securely stored on the password protected online file storage software Dropbox.

Observations

In addition to interviews with each participant I also conducted observations in the "natural" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 107) classroom setting of each faculty

member. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006) observations are "the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for the study" (p. 98). Observations complimented the interviews because they provided the opportunity to experience faculty participants' reality in the classroom. Observations took place in the weeks following the interview.

While in the classroom I observed how faculty approached their teaching. Throughout each observation I took extensive field notes describing how faculty participants and students engaged in the classroom. I specifically looked for participants' strategies related to teaching and interacting with students. The purpose of the observation was not to evaluate participants, but to observe their approach to teaching and interactions that occurred between them and students. Observations were useful for validating participants' responses to interview questions about their implementation of student retention best practices in the classroom. Notes from the observation were analyzed for themes and patterns using the same codes derived from the analysis of the interview transcriptions. Prior to analysis, observation notes were not transcribed. Instead hand-written field notes were evaluated for common themes and strategies consistent with, or contradictory to, the findings that emerged from the interview data.

Data Analysis

Interpretive analysis is an analytic process that leads the researcher to make sense of the data by developing themes and connections across the data. As Erickson (1986) described, "interpretive research is concerned with the specifics of

meaning and action" (p. 156). The most important element of interpretive analysis is similar to inductive analysis in that the researcher is responsible for making connections from the specific experience of participants and applying them to the general experiences of the larger context (Willis, 2007, p. 213). Moving from participant responses to "sense-making is the heart of the matter" with interpretive analysis (p. 127). It is recommended that interpretive analysis takes place following a first level inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002). Used together in this study, both analysis strategies focused on the experiences of faculty participants to shed light on the research questions.

The data were analyzed using inductive and interpretive analysis processes (Erickson, 1986; Hatch, 2002). Inductive analysis is a "search for patterns of meaning in the data so that general statements about phenomena under investigation can be made" (Hatch, 2002, p. 161). As Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) described, analytic induction means "the researcher searches through the data bit by bit and then infers that certain events or statements are instances of the same underlying theme or pattern" (p. 28). According to Thomas (2006) "inductive analysis refers to approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher" (p. 238). Inductive analysis is useful for moving from categorical codes to recognizable themes and patterns in the data. The process of developing and refining themes and patterns "included analysis in the search for confirming or disconfirming evidence to support or negate the emerging theory" (Paterson, Thorne, Crawford, & Tarko, 1999). Data were analyzed to look for

evidence specifically related to answering the research questions as well as evidence that conflicted with the emerging themes and patterns. Findings related to both confirming and disconfirming evidence are presented in a later chapter.

Inductive and interpretive analysis are appropriate data analysis methods for this study because together they complement narrative analysis, essentially because a "narrative analyst interrogates intention and language—how and why incidents are storied, not simply the content" (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). The narrative stories described by participates are equal in importance to the reason the participant chooses to share that particular story or experience. Narrative experiences described by participants, as stories, are the way people represent themselves (May, 2002). The stories and experiences described by participants provide the data needed to understand how they perceive their role in student retention because they give context to the lived experience of their classroom teaching. The steps involved with "constructing meaning from the data" (Hatch, 2002, p. 180) involve using the stories and experiences of participants to decipher meaning through interpretive analysis as described in Chapter 4 (see Table 2).

Constructing meaning from the data using interpretive analysis involves following each step outlined by Hatch (2002). First, after reading each transcribed interview I spent time reviewing each transcript to identify common frames of analysis (i.e., themes). Second, as I read and evaluated each transcript, the relationships across the findings became apparent.

Once I determined the common themes and relationships among the data, I assigned codes to the common themes using the software Hyperresearch.

Table 2

Constructing Meaning from Data

1. Read the data and identify frames of analysis
2. Create domains based on semantic relationships discovered within frames of analysis
3. Identify salient domains, assign them a code, and put others aside
4. Reread data, refining salient domains and keeping a record of where relationships are found in the data
5. Decide if your domains are supported by the data and search data for examples that do not fit or run counter to the relationships in your domains
6. Complete an analysis within domains
7. Search for themes across domains
8. Create master outline expressing relationships with and among domains
9. Select data excerpts to support the elements in your outline

Adapted from: Hatch, J. A. (2002). Doing qualitative research in education settings. *State University of New York Press*: Albany, NY.

All other information was set aside. Fourth, I organized all codes from each transcript to group them together based on common relationships. Fifth, following a review and cataloging of codes, coded data were divided into categories related to the research questions. After this, I further investigated the data within each domain (subtheme) to discover new links and relationships. To organize and refine the analysis of data, I created a master outline of relationships and codes (e.g., experience as a student and faculty motivation; and responsibility to student and role in student retention). Finally, once organized, I tied existing data to the literature that supported the elements from my findings.

Coding

As step three in the process described in Table 2 indicates, each transcribed interview contained extensive data about participants' perceptions of their role in student success. To begin to dissect the data, I engaged in a thorough coding and analysis process. "Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). Coding was a useful tool for identifying and organizing data from each interview and observation into identifiable groupings of words and phrases. Given the use of interpretive analysis, codes and patterns were developed and analyzed throughout the interviewing and observation, transcription, coding and analysis process. These patterns and themes provided insight into how faculty understand their role in retaining students.

Memoing

Step four of the process outlined in Table 2 is memo writing. "Memo-writing is the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I kept detailed memos of observations and connections that emerged from the data. Memoing is useful for triggering additional questions and recording insights throughout the analysis process. Memoing is not simply another note taking strategy; it ties pieces of data together into clusters of connections and similarities (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Memos provided a valuable tool before, during, and after each interview and observation. I wrote memos after each interview and through each contact with the data during the analysis process. One of the most useful aspects of the memoing process is that memos can be a lengthy summary of a recently conducted interview or they can be a simple note scribbled on a scrap piece of paper, which later leads to a different connection or direction. Thoroughly evaluating each element of data through the memoing process ensured all information was given an appropriate amount of attention.

Researcher as Instrument

My interest in this topic comes from my personal experience as a student who benefitted from faculty who made conscious efforts to interact with and engage students in the learning process. I personally benefitted from exposure to active learning and group work, which consisted of faculty focusing more on classroom interaction and discussion than on lecture. Assignments required interaction with classmates inside and outside of the classroom. I excelled in classrooms where

expectations were clearly outlined by faculty and reiterated throughout the semester. Now as an adjunct professor, I deliberately incorporate active learning in each of my classes. I require students to engage in classroom conversation by working in groups to develop and lead chapter discussions throughout the semester. Each semester I look for students who are struggling, and I try to reach out to those who need extra attention and help, similar to how I remember being as a student.

As a professional in higher education I have spent considerable time implementing strategies to improve student experiences on campus and increase retention. As the Program Director of Orientation I worked to develop a mandatory orientation program that introduced students to the campus, other students, and campus involvement opportunities. A significant goal of this program is to encourage students to connect to campus to facilitate their successful navigation of college. Faculty were invited to engage with students throughout orientation sessions, and students were advised to take advantage of all opportunities faculty offer to engage with them inside or outside of the classroom.

In my current position as Director of Admissions, I am committed to providing access to college for all students. As an admissions officer at an open enrollment institution I am thrilled to provide opportunities for higher education to students who may not initially feel that higher education is in their future. This position allows me to collaborate with individuals from across campus to ensure that once students are admitted they are offered multiple opportunities to interact with other students and engage on campus.

As a student and professional in higher education I assume that faculty have an interest in ensuring each student is successfully retained. I came to this conclusion because of my personal experience in college classrooms and interactions with faculty colleagues at Utah Valley University. The faculty I have interacted with as a student and colleague have impressed me with their commitment to student learning and education. This assumption impacted this study because I approach faculty with a preconceived notion of how they view their ability to influence students in a positive way. In my experience as a student and professional, faculty had always demonstrated a desire to have a positive impact on student learning experiences. I have mediated the impact of this assumption by reviewing analysis materials and findings with the interview participants.

Limitations

Although the results of this study are useful for faculty and student affairs and campus administrators, I acknowledge several limitations. The acknowledgment of limitations serves to strengthen the findings as well as provide a context for the results and their interpretation. Additionally, identifying these limitations provides a springboard for future research. Limitations of the current study include: (1) the homogeneity of the sample including the participants themselves and the fact that participants were recruited from one institution, a Research I institution, which limits the scope and generalizability of the research findings; (2) the participants in this study only taught general education courses; (3) my own researcher influence and current full-time professional experience in higher education; and 4) the absence of a final interview with 1 participant.

First, the fact that all participants were the same race and came from the same institution limits the scope and generalizability of the study's findings to other higher education institutions. Additionally, recruiting all participants from the same Research I institution reduces the applicability of findings to other institutions. Lack of diversity represented by the participants in this study may influence their previous student and teaching experiences, thereby impacting how they approach teaching. Additionally, the different expectations for faculty at various colleges and universities make it difficult to apply study findings to community or teaching colleges.

Second, study participants who fit certain criteria were intentionally selected to participate in the data collection process. In spite of efforts to recruit a larger sample size, a small sample population limits the generalizability of findings to larger faculty populations. The sample for this study was deliberately recruited from departments teaching general education courses. Given the nature of the study, it was important to recruit faculty who teach in undergraduate courses because of the large number of first and second year students attending these classes. The same deliberate efforts to recruit faculty teaching certain courses limit the transferability of the findings for faculty and departments teaching upper-division and graduate courses.

Third, it was important for me to check and recheck myself throughout the interview, analysis, and writing process to ensure that I acknowledged my personal biases. To do so, I intentionally allowed the conversation during the interview to flow freely, following the cues and ideas presented by the participants. Because I

personally benefitted from specific faculty teaching strategies as an undergraduate student and I have worked in higher education for several years, to ensure trustworthiness I utilized two data collection methods (interviews and classroom observations) to triangulate and validate the study's findings. This research strategy, known as "triangulation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 99), helped strengthen the outcomes of the study because the common themes and findings were consistent across interview and observations.

Finally, Dr. Jones did not complete the entire data collection process. Although the findings related to this participant were gleaned from an initial interview and observation, missing the important final interview and opportunity to ask clarifying questions limits the information gathered from this participant. The impact on the study should be minimal because I collected important information from the initial interview and observation. Dr. Jones' perceptions of his role in student retention were identified in the first interview and observation, giving me enough data for his narrative to contribute to this study.

Trustworthiness

It was important to maintain trustworthiness across the interviews, observations, and data analysis. As Miles and Huberman (1994) described, the researcher's responsibility is to establish a trustworthy study by gaining familiarity with the phenomenon and related research and utilizing a multidisciplinary approach to the research. In an effort to establish trustworthiness for this study I used multiple data collection methods (i.e., interviews and observations) and worked with each participant to review transcriptions and ask clarifying questions.

Using two different data collection methods allowed me to check the data and ask clarifying questions as I analyzed the data and triangulated common themes from the transcriptions and observation notes. As researcher, I attempted to triangulate the data to "substantiate the various data sets with each other" (Carlson, 2010, p. 1104). In addition, Denzin (1978) noted that triangulation refers to "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon" (p. 291). By using multiple methodologies to investigate faculty perceptions of their role in student retention and success, the resulting findings are stronger.

In an additional effort to establish trustworthiness I sought to provide participants with an opportunity to check their transcriptions. Member checking is an important opportunity "for members [participants] to check particular aspects of the interpretation of the data they provided" (Carlson, 2010, p. 1105). After the first interview and classroom observation, faculty participants were given the opportunity to review their transcriptions and discuss emerging findings in our final interview. In addition to providing me with an opportunity to ask clarifying questions about my analysis, the final interview was useful for the participants and myself to ensure that interview transcriptions and data analysis accurately reflected their experience. Because I was not able to conduct a final interview with Dr. Jones, I missed the opportunity to member check and ask clarifying questions.

Research Ethics

With rigorous data recording, storage, and evaluation processes I worked to ensure confidentiality and an accurate record of the experiences and beliefs of faculty participants. Each recorded and transcribed interview was stored in a

password protected folder saved on the online data storage software Dropbox. Throughout the evaluation process all memos, notes, and coded data were saved and stored in the same folders. All names and other personally identifiable information were changed to protect individual identities. Pseudonyms were determined by me to protect participants' identities. Before the recruitment of participants, I obtained approval for the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Utah.

I recognize that my position as a researcher placed me in a role that may have been uncomfortable for participants. During the interview process, I made concerted efforts to build rapport and present myself as an interested researcher rather than an agent of the institution who had come to infiltrate their world. This strategy was particularly useful in the classroom observation. Once I developed good rapport with participants through the interview process they were more comfortable with my observation of their classroom teaching strategies. Throughout the classroom observation, I did not record identifiable student information. Each of these measures were taken to ensure participants felt comfortable with providing accurate information and to safeguard data from being used inappropriately by others.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter begins with brief descriptions of each faculty participant and their previous experience and approach to teaching, as well as the setting for the classroom observation. Next, I outline several key findings related to the purpose of this study, which was to investigate the motivation behind how these participants approach teaching, specifically examining how they perceive their role in retaining students and how they utilize student retention best practices in the classroom. Providing a historical and contextual description for each participant and observational setting sets the stage for a description of findings related to this study.

Faculty Participants and Observations

Dr. Jones

Dr. Jones is a young contract professor interested in collaborating with other faculty to improve student experiences and learning in the classroom. He discovered full-time teaching during his experience as a graduate student at the University of Utah. He recalled, "having limited teaching experience, and they [department] paid very little attention to me. I spoke English; I wasn't too much of a problem for anyone so they put me in some classes and I did okay. I liked it. I think I'm a talkative person obviously, comparatively to the average mathematician."

Before being asked to teach as a graduate student, teaching was not on Dr. Jones' radar: "I have been here since, a long time I guess. I used to be a graduate student here, since 2002, then I left in 2008 and did a post doc and came back after 3 years." Dr. Jones acknowledged accepting his job with the specific goal of "improving educational outcomes for students' experience along with retention and also their proficiency." In his teaching and interaction with students he strives to create a classroom where students engage in discussion and connect with lessons. This can be difficult in the classroom I observed, which has between 50-75 students.

In a large classroom Dr. Jones has to make direct efforts to open the discussion and involve students. Dr. Jones explained his approach to teaching:

> I do [a] fairly standard lecture, a good performance, where I can introduce the ideas and connect them to what we did before, all the conceptual stuff…It is usually a follow up; I'll actually print out a worksheet or get a problem on the board. Or, I'll leave the floor open for homework questions, and then again start talking about things. Those are the three components that go into a day of class with the students. Those are the three parts; the bulk of it is lecture and then a smaller portion for the other issues examples, specific examples and then examples the students are working on themselves.

In my observation of Dr. Jones, he asked many questions to engage students. The classroom discussion appeared to drive the direction of his lecture. At one point a student asked a question about a specific principle and Dr. Jones moved to another side of the room to draw an example and lead the class through the clarifying discussion. Dr. Jones engaged and interacted with students as he taught complex equations and algorithms.

Dr. Smith

The road to teaching for Dr. Smith ran through public education and then the University of Utah. Dr. Smith was interested in teaching students at the University of Utah, Utah's flagship institution, and to influence the lives of future STEM majors. Her move to the University of Utah was intriguing because of the newly created Center for Math and Science Education, and Dr. Smith's focus on math in STEM fields. Dr. Smith enjoys interacting with students and involving them in the learning process. However, interacting with students can be challenging when she teaches in classrooms with 200-250 students.

To encourage students to interact in the large auditorium, which was about half-full, Dr. Smith began her class with several problems written on the board. Students were encouraged to begin working on the problems while Dr. Smith and her TAs walked around the classroom answering questions from individual students.

> I do some examples and then give them (students) some time to try the examples on their own; again, people are wandering around; that takes 10 minutes or so. We will go through the examples asking questions, I might do another round of it depending on how things went. I try to tie things together, how these concepts fit together. From my evaluations that seems to be really helpful.

During my observation Dr. Smith was very attentive to students who seemed to struggle through problems or who had become stumped. She and her TAs were willing to take the time necessary to provide students with additional attention. Students were encouraged to ask questions, and Dr. Smith walked around the classroom stopping at student desks to interact with them one-on-one.

Dr. Taylor

Dr. Taylor stated, "I have been here [University of Utah] for 8 years. This is my eighth year. I did 5 as a Ph.D. student and then I was invited to join the faculty in my department." Based on his experience on a debate team as an undergraduate student, the University of Utah was a draw for Dr. Taylor because, "I think that this particular campus works really well for me mainly because even though it is a Research I campus there is a lot of deliberate efforts made to make programs available for undergrad students like the debate programs and there are a lot of programs on campus." From his own experience as an undergraduate student and as a coach for a student organization on campus, Dr. Taylor wants students to learn lessons they can apply to their own lived experiences. One of his first classes as a college student was an engaging discussion-based course, Dr. Taylor recalls learning most effectively in that course. As a result, although he teaches in a large auditorium of 125-150 students, Dr. Taylor makes concerted efforts to involve his students in the learning process.

Dr. Taylor endeavored to create a classroom setting that encouraged conversation. "When the classes get larger I try to generate the discussion by quizzing the students, questioning the students about the things I'm lecturing about." Although I observed frequent attempts to engage the students, the classroom was dimmed to allow easier visibility of the PowerPoint, so many raised hands were left unanswered. When Dr. Taylor looked for interaction he walked off the stage and out among the students to interact with and call on them. In a large

classroom with a stage and a PowerPoint, student interaction seemed to be difficult to achieve, despite Dr. Taylor's efforts.

Dr. Meyers

Dr. Meyers' drive behind pursuing teaching was rooted in her description of her own classroom experiences. "My favorite teachers, it was when I was an undergrad, taught the same way. Interestingly they, the one that I took my very first history class, she was an adjunct and she was so funny, and I just was hooked. That was it for me. While I don't know that I'm consciously emulating her, I'm sure that is my model, probably." After teaching for almost 20 years, the motivation for Dr. Meyers' remains the same: to create a learning environment where students can be successful. She stated she wanted students to admit that they,

> Don't know how much you are learning because you are engaged and then at the end of the semester and look back, even 20 years later now, I [you] go "You know, I learned a lot in that class." I learned to think about things in a different way and I still will be sort of, I'll draw on those kinds of ways of seeing material and putting it all together, still.

The learning environment Dr. Meyers attempts to create in a relatively small classroom of 25-50 students is designed to get students to think outside of the box and connect what they learn in the classroom with new "aha moments!"

The desire for interaction in Dr. Meyer's classroom was evident from the moment she walked in the room. I observed her interactions with students, on a personal level, before the class began. For example, in my observation I witnessed her conversations with one student regarding their recent surgery and recovery. Throughout the lecture students were encouraged to participate and draw examples from their readings; however, it appeared that only a few students participated in

this discussion. As the lecture continued Dr. Meyers called on specific students who had not been involved to incorporate them into the class discussion. During my observation Dr. Meyers made several attempts to engage with students and involve them in the conversation.

Each participant outlined different motivations for pursuing teaching and described a different path to teaching full-time at the University of Utah. Despite their varied experiences and length of time in the classroom, each participant acknowledged a commitment to teaching and student learning. The previous experiences of these participants influenced how they perceive their role in student retention and how they approach teaching in the classroom to improve student success.

Findings—Themes and Domains

The findings presented in this section identify how faculty participants perceive their role in student persistence decisions and outline the strategies they use to influence student learning. Each participant described how they perceived their role in retaining students and how they approached their teaching. The following themes and domains (subthemes) emerged consistently across each participant interview and observation (see Table 3): Theme 1) Perceptions of their role in learning; 2) Long-term commitment to students' career goals; 3) Promoting classroom discussion influences student learning; and 4) Clearly outlining expectations positively impacts the student learning experience. Additional theme details and definitions are described in the following sections.

Table 3

Categorization of Themes and Domains

Theme	**Domain (sub-theme)**
1- Perceptions of their role in learning	- Responsibility for student retention - Impact of retention literature on teaching - Student retention does not influence approach to teaching
2- Long-term commitment to the students' career goals	- Sense of responsibility to ensure students will continue to learn in future classes and throughout their educational career - Apply course materials to their current experience
3- Active involvement in the course promotes student learning	- Students actively participate in learning - Provide opportunities for student-to-student interaction
4- Clearly outline expectations to positively impacts student learning	- Providing clear expectations improve learning experiences - Students receive prompt feedback

Perceptions of Their Role in Retention

The fundamental purpose of this research study was to determine how participants perceive the role they play in student retention and success. This purpose was rooted in each interview question and observation made throughout the research process. I explored participants' perceptions by asking questions about how they approached their teaching and what motivated them to teach that way. Ultimately, I was interested in understanding whether the concept of student retention motivated faculty to implement certain teaching strategies in their courses. Following the data collection and analysis process, it became apparent that participants understood that they did have a role in impacting student persistence decisions. However, their awareness of this role does not influence how they approach their teaching. What did motivate participants was a desire for students to learn effectively. Additionally, participants were motivated by a sense of responsibility for the long-term success of students, and they acknowledged that success and learning were facilitated by their ability to tie course content to the student's current experience and create an engaging learning environment.

Responsibility for Student Retention

It was clear that the participants in this study recognized the term student retention and its definition. When asked about his role in student retention, Dr. Jones wondered, "is it my responsibility to do that? I certainly don't want to absolve myself, but do I think it is? I guess the answer is I don't know." He viewed his role in retention primarily as an educator teaching students about the value of their educational experience. This is contrary to Dr. Smith, who also recognized that she

plays a role in student retention but noted that it does not influence her approach to teaching. She stated: "it is my responsibility to ensure that they [students] know those things [course content] and that I make it not inaccessible." Dr. Smith understood that students had to take the initiative, but she wanted to ensure that learning was accessible to all students. Her desire for students to be successful contributed to her desire to teach in such a way that students, regardless of their learning style or personal initiative, could access and learn the material.

Dr. Meyers desired to provide students the best chance to successfully complete her course and move on to the next course armed with new knowledge and information; however, she admitted "you are never going to get everybody." Trying to teach to every student's unique learning style and preferences is impossible. Instead, Dr. Meyers found strategies that worked with her own teaching style such as involving students in classroom discussion and getting to know the students in order to connect the lesson materials to their experiences. Similarly, Dr. Taylor recognized that although he plays a role in student retention, students hold the primary responsibility for their success. He suggested:

> I think not letting students become passive is a really important part of doing good work. I think that students feeling efficacious as learners is really important and I think that it takes care of itself for active students and I think that students who start to become passive about school are the students that are at risk for finding themselves in a place of "I can't do it."

Regardless of his understanding of his specific role in student retention, Dr. Taylor admitted, "a lot of it is as much as it may or may not be a good strategy, it is a strategy that I find enjoyable so that's probably the truest reason of why I do it." Acknowledging the reality that not every student persists was consistent across

participants.

Through several interviews participants argued that students should take responsibility for their own education. This may contribute to the finding that participants recognize their role in student retention, but that this role is not a source of motivation. Dr. Smith recognized, "it is my responsibility to help them realize they need to go after things themselves, and that is a tough thing." Dr. Meyers mentioned that students have to recognize the investment in themselves, "if they don't want to disappear." The participants in this study expect some accountability and initiative from students. Dr. Jones, although indecisive about his specific role in retention, did note that this role is impacted by many external forces (i.e., student personal and professional obligations and aspirations). He recognized that he and his department play a major role in helping students understand the value of a college education, which influences their desire to persist, but he also acknowledged that many students do not take responsibility for their education. He recognized his own role in retaining students, but was not motivated by this because he felt that students ultimately had to take the initiative and make the effort.

Dr. Smith felt a different responsibility to the students, "if 25% of my students aren't successful, then I'm clearly not successful. Until 100% of the students are successful, I've got a ways to go." Dr. Smith was motivated to be a successful educator out of a sense of responsibility to ensure that all students continue to learn and progress through their education to successful lives and careers. She admitted, "I don't have this great story to tell you that someone

reached, and helped me. This is the flagship institution, I keep hearing that, this is the flagship institution we should be producing the very best [students]. I had the sense that we [faculty] should be ourselves the very best." Dr. Smith felt responsible for being the best she can be because she recognized that she represented the institution and all of the expectations students have for their education at the university.

Recognizing that they did play a role in influencing student persistence decisions did not translate into a perceived responsibility for retaining students for study participants. Rather, they approached teaching with a desire to help students learn effectively by utilizing strategies and tactics that aligned with their own style and philosophy. Examples of effective teaching and useful practices are frequently found in retention literature specifically focused on teaching (Astin, 1993; Bean & Eaton, 2001; Braxton, 2008; Chang, 2005; Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt 2008; Schreiner, 2011; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).

Impact of Retention Literature on Teaching

Investigating how participants perceive their role in retaining students led me to wonder whether they were aware of research that points to the significance of this role. I wondered whether knowledge of the literature influenced them as faculty members and what awareness they had of research that supports particular teaching strategies for promoting student retention.

Dr. Taylor acknowledged an understanding of some research related to retention, but he recognized that his knowledge was limited. What he did know from his own study of retention literature was that recent studies focused on

examining the strategies used by faculty to improve student retention in their classrooms. He noted that the literature suggested "these are the things you do as a teacher to make students successful in the long term as opposed to successful in the class." Dr. Taylor's awareness of retention literature was evident in his desire to help students not only connect with him as the professor, or engage with other students solely in his class, he also tried to ensure that students made efforts to connect with the entire campus.

Although his exposure was limited, Dr. Jones did recall reading literature suggesting that students "are more willing [to persist], if they see a target that has value… if it has some sort of existential value, they will be more willing to persist through whatever." He further explained that he and his department had started conversations to develop efficient paths through students' programs, to graduation, and out to the workforce. Dr. Jones assumed that if students can see the end goal, they will be more likely to persist to degree attainment.

While not every participant discussed a knowledge of specific retention literature (i.e., Dr. Meyers and Dr. Smith), throughout each interview, participants related examples and experiences that echoed previous retention research findings and literature. It seemed that although participants could not recall knowledge or connect their motivation or approach to specific retention literature, how they described their approach to teaching aligned with findings from previous retention studies.

Student Retention Does Not Influence Approach to Teaching

After first understanding how participants perceived their role in retaining students, I next focused on understanding whether their approach to teaching was influenced by that understanding. If faculty are aware of how they can influence student success, are they then motivated to approach their teaching and interactions with students through a student retention lens? The short answer to this question is no; however, this does not mean these participants are completely disinterested in student retention or success, or that they are oblivious to how their teaching influences students' experiences.

One of Dr. Meyers' teaching goals is for students to learn to learn and to be thoughtful so they can use that skill in her class, through future classes, and throughout their lives:

> No one is going to remember it all beyond the class or the exam. I don't remember either; I've looked it up. I don't care about that. But at least they learn how to learn it so that when they forget so they can learn it again or they can apply those same ideas or methods to other classes, other disciplines, work, whatever it is. That is what I'm hoping for.

Although student retention was not acknowledged as the motivation for Dr. Meyers' approach to teaching, student success was a motivation: when students learn to learn they can use that skill to successfully navigate the next class and the next, thus improving their long-term success.

Developing life-long learners who can reflect and build a mastery of the material also influenced Dr. Jones's approach to teaching. He suggested that "if people get left alone with a duty, they'll do it as well as they can do it, but teaching is a reflective process. It is about reflection continually on what you are doing. Any

kind of mastery, any set of it requires reflection." Dr. Jones wants his students to learn how to develop a set of knowledge and skills.

Dr. Smith approached teaching by "focusing a lot on the real world, understanding the problem and stripping away all the variables that are confounding it and try to just get down to what exactly the question is asking." Her approach to teaching is not influenced by a desire to retain students. However, she discussed taking the time to engage students in the conversation as they dissect the questions. As she recalled,

> I will introduce a concept and give them some sort of background of whatever it is we are going to do. Explain some stuff, do some examples and then get them some time to try the examples on their own… We will go through the examples asking questions, I might do another round of it depending on how things went. I try to tie things together, how these concepts fit together.

Her motivation for approaching teaching this way was to involve the students in their learning experience.

Getting students to think outside of their own experiences and previous knowledge influences Dr. Taylor's teaching more than his knowledge of retention research. He acknowledged, "I think that that probably informs the way that I think about teaching. Provoking students to find, out of the assumptions they have or to find the kind of knowledge they are bringing to the class then ask them the question." By learning where students are currently, Dr. Taylor can steer their learning more effectively. He acknowledged his own experience as a student influenced by faculty who challenged and encouraged him to think outside of his own box. He recalled having a professor who adopted the teaching model of "challenging you until you didn't have answers, and then saying okay that is the

place you need to start going." Dr. Taylor wanted to get to know his students' previous knowledge and assumptions so he could tailor his lessons to challenge and teach them to engage in their learning.

Although each participant was not directly influenced by the retention research, they described the end result of their approach to teaching as students learning the material and applying those lessons and skills to future courses. Overall, it seemed clear that although participants were not specifically motivated by the idea of student retention, they acknowledged that they understood that how they teach and interact with students has an impact on students' success.

Long-term Commitment to the Students' Life and Career Goals

A common thread throughout each interview was that participants wanted students to have a good experience in their classroom. Participants hoped that students not only earned a good grade in their course, but that students also connected course content to their lives and future educational pursuits. I defined this long-term commitment as participants' desire to not only develop curriculum that allows students to learn the material for a particular course, but to also teach in a way that the curriculum becomes applicable inside their class and outside of the institution to improve students' lived experience and future careers.

Sense of Responsibility to Ensure Students Will Continue to Learn in Future Classes and throughout their Educational Careers

Several participants described feeling a responsibility to students not only for their successful completion of a specific course, but for the successful completion

of future classes and careers. For Dr. Smith, this responsibility was rooted in a feeling that students are "somebody's children." She described feeling a strong motivation to teach effectively because students are more than just a number or a seat; they are individuals who want to improve themselves. She felt a responsibility to provide students with the best opportunity for success in her course which increases their chances for success in subsequent courses. During my observation, Dr. Smith took several opportunities to make sure students understood the information, even stopping at some points to ask students if they understood the information. Before reviewing several problems, she asked students to pay special attention because this information would be important for future lessons.

Similarly, Dr. Taylor was thoughtful about teaching in such a way that students can apply the lessons from her course to their current education and personal lives. She deliberately explained to students, "This is something that you need to know for this class but it is also something that will make you successful in a lot of other classes." Dr. Taylor has found that students are more involved in their education when they see its connection to their own experiences and goals.

From his years of teaching experience Dr. Jones acknowledged a desire to help students connect the value of his course content to their long-term goals. For example, if career choice is the long-term goal, he suggested: "If you [the students] really wanted a career course, you are willing to be in at it, willing to roll with the punches a bit more. You are going to persist because you have a target to hit." In his classes and interactions with students, Dr. Jones attempted to remind students of the end goal to keep them motivated and excited about what they are learning. Dr.

Jones demonstrated a commitment to the long-term success of students that extends beyond his classroom. Dr. Taylor made similar attempts to help students transfer what they learn to the world outside the classroom:

> I do deliberately think about what is the value that I'm teaching the students that extends past their grade and this class? So they get a mind full of it to that extent. How are we contributing to their overall success as students rather than just their success in his course this semester? To the point that, or to the extent that is something that has become naturalized, that's the foundation that that is coming out of right, these are the things you do as a teacher to make students successful in the long term as opposed to successful in the class.

Participants recognized that a long-term commitment to the students' success not only in their current class but in the future helps students have a more successful learning experience while positively impacting their persistence decisions.

Apply Course Material to Students' Current Experiences

Several participants mentioned a motivation to teach in a way that students could apply course content to their personal lives and current experiences. After teaching at the University for several years, Dr. Smith recognized that many students experience an apprehension about and aversion to math; however, for the majority of University of Utah students math is a program requirement. Recognizing the current experiences of her students, Dr. Smith noted,

> I think about my audience, I think about that they typically have not had great success in math. I make the environment safe enough that they will do it; the other thing is you have to do it so that if they have questions they can get some help and they feel safe asking for help.

Dr. Smith acknowledged that many of her students are nervous about the subject matter. Her recognition of students' aversion to math motivates her to create an environment where students can interact and ask questions to reduce their

apprehension. She does this by helping students connect math to what they are learning in other courses. In my observation she knew students' names and took extra time to answer specific questions to ensure that students understood the information. Overall, Dr. Smith's goal is for students to have a good experience in math in order to make their transition to other classes and through the University a success.

For other participants the desire to apply course materials to students' current experiences did not conclude at the door of the classroom. Dr. Meyers suggested that her plan is to "find ways to engage them [students]. I do find ways to really tap them into what it is that is important for them, about what we are talking about. Apply it to whatever it is that they are interested in." Dr. Meyers noted that a key to student retention, as well as a validation for a long-time faculty member, is the student returning years later to compliment her on what they learned in her class:

> "I still think about the things that we talked about in the class." There is not a better praise for a teacher than to hear that, there is a lasting effect. I think that's it. I think that it's what you can do to make them, it's not that they are remembering what you are saying, it's that it made them think about whatever it is. I think that is it. I think that is the key to retention.

Dr. Meyers wants students to have a long-term connection with the material, thereby influencing their experience in the classroom and in the future. Similarly, Dr. Taylor connects with students by teaching them in a way that connects the content with experiences in their own lives. He noted:

> A lot of what I do is trying to get them to apply that knowledge to some sort of circumstance that resonates with them, so that they can operationalize that in terms of thinking about how our argumentation works in the work place or in

> some sort of organizations they are a part of, or what context we can find that lights them up about that topic.

Both of these participants found that students resonated with opportunities to connect course materials with their current experiences outside of the classroom.

Additionally, Dr. Meyers sought to provide an environment in which students can engage with her and the material until they experience an epiphany and see how the content connects with their lives. She noted, "I want them to have an epiphany, I want them to sort of go, 'Oh yeah I've never thought of that before.'" She continued,

> I really sometimes just want them to break out of the way that they see the world, their world view. Maybe they aren't going to change their mind, but I just want to consider that there are other views. Not just, "Oh yeah I know about these because these people over here believe this." I want them to think, "Oh that is kind of interesting." I probably have become a little bit more provocative, I want to provoke more then I used too.

Dr. Meyers strives to help students connect with their world in a different way. Her specific style in the classroom reflects her desire to interact with students and provide examples that connect the course curriculum with what the student is experiencing outside of the classroom.

To connect with students on a personal level, and to connect classroom content with their current experiences, Dr. Meyers asked questions about students' personal lives. When observing her class, as we waited for the class to begin, Dr. Meyers asked several students about updates in their lives. She also uses humor as a strategy to help students connect course content to their own experience:

> I tell a lot of jokes. I mean sometimes they are just not funny. I'm always going alright; you know what it is, I just basically am me and I'll tell stories about stupid things I've done and for whatever reason that seems to disarm them and

> then it allows them to engage much more, like you would be going out to dinner with somebody.

Personally connecting with students gives Dr. Meyers a valuable tool to assist her as she links classroom content with their personal lives. This provides a better experience for students in the classroom and improves their learning.

To help students connect with his course materials, Dr. Taylor draws on his own experience as a college student. He noted that he was fortunate to have "the opportunity to have a lot of instructors that came from the approach of 'I am not here to tell you what to think, but I'm certainly here to challenge you to think about things that you take for granted.'" This approach motivates Dr. Taylor's teaching style, which includes frequent interactions with students in an effort to understand their ideas and current experiences, and challenge them for the purpose of teaching them how course materials apply to their lives in ways they did not recognize. In my observation of his class, I noticed how Dr. Taylor implemented this strategy by asking a student to clarify his response to a question and then using the student's previously disclosed experiences to tie the two answers together. At another point, during a particularly engaging conversation between Dr. Taylor and several students, he asked a question, listened for the response, and then asked a follow-up question requiring the students to think more deeply. After a few seconds of silence another student in the classroom jumped in to offer his answer. Students engaged in the discussion and offered their own answers based on their previous experiences and knowledge.

The preceding findings focused on how the participants in this study demonstrated a commitment not only to students' success in their courses, but also

to students' ability to apply course content to future courses and their lives outside of the classroom. Participants found that students learn more effectively and have better overall experiences in their education when these strategies are used in the classroom.

Promoting Classroom Discussion Influences Student Learning

A common theme throughout this study was that participants recognized the value of creating an interactive and engaging classroom for students. According to participants, actively engaging students in their learning improved students' experience in the classroom. Additionally, participants acknowledged that one reason to create discussion and develop an engaging classroom is to provide opportunities for students to interact with the faculty member and other students. Specific subthemes related to this theme are described in this section, including: actively involving students in their learning, and providing opportunities for student-to-student interaction to promote discussion and learning.

Students Actively Participate in Learning

I defined promoting active participation in the learning process as faculty providing opportunities for students to interact with the faculty member, fellow students, or the course material through questioning, classroom discussion, and other active teaching strategies. I witnessed many attempts by participants to encourage students to participate in active learning by providing a problem for students to solve within a group, asking questions and waiting for a response or

answer, or walking throughout the classroom as they lecture or to answer questions during student discussion.

One of the strategies used by study participants to actively interact with students involved posting questions or problems on the board and asking students to work through the problems and ask questions. Dr. Smith stated, "I want to have this conversation and I want to have a dialogue and see what these students are thinking and discussing and seeing where they are." To promote classroom discussion, when students enter the classroom Dr. Smith writes three problems on the board. As the class begins, Dr. Smith invites students to work through the problems as she and her TAs walk throughout the classroom and answer questions. She encourages students to interact with one another as they work through different stages of the problem. While they work on the problem she interacts with students by asking questions. After several minutes of students working on their own, Dr. Smith works through each problem on the board. I observed Dr. Jones utilizing strategies similar to those of Dr. Smith for involving students in the classroom:

> One [strategy] is actually to give a problem on the board and say, "I want you do it." Or you can just do part of something and then stop for a little longer and say, "What is the next step?" and have people think for a while and have that cognitive pause where people have to guess at it.

At one point during my observation after the students were slow to respond to his question, Dr. Taylor took the time to draw another example on the board to clarify the principle. Both of these participants invited students to participate and ask questions while they worked on problems. Both made deliberate attempts to actively involve students in the learning process by engaging them in the classroom.

Like Dr. Smith, creating an engaging environment in the classroom was important to Dr. Taylor. He acknowledged that active learning experiences in the classroom encourage students to continue their education, "I think that if students are actively engaged in their education that probably means they are going to be more likely to continue it." He suggested that not only should the classroom be engaging, but that he considers this environment when he develops classroom exercises: "I think that creates a better experience so to that regard, yeah, when I prepare I look through what I have prepared and where are spaces where I can effectively get conversation going or ask questions." Dr. Taylor understood the importance of engaging students in the classroom in order to connect them to the material and himself.

In a similar way, Dr. Meyers tried to create an interactive classroom in order to: "feel like I'm not up there alone." Engaging the students in the classroom, Dr. Meyers created an environment where she is not flying solo as the only participant:

> I don't like when you have to turn the lights up or down, because then is just now, it's alone. You are lonely. I think they feel it too. I think that they may not realize that but I think there is that sense that they are sort of an observer rather than a participant. The reason why I ask people questions is trying to elicit some sort of participation, not for points, but rather for, to make sure they are actually actively learning.

Dr. Meyers engaged students in their learning experience because she does not want to be a solo lecturer. For Dr. Taylor the motivation to actively involve students in the learning process is a genuine concern for maintaining students' level of interest. He stated,

> I don't like being in a position that I'm going to have to talk for 80 minutes. I can but I would get bored. I suppose I feel the same way about their situation.

> Listening to someone talk at them for 80 minutes, it is probably not a very exciting experience to have.

Dr. Taylor recognized that students sit in the classroom for several hours a day for multiple days each week. His intent in creating an opportunity for students to engage with the material is to maintain interest in the material for the length of the class.

As a strategy to help students engage with the lesson and classroom materials some participants utilized PowerPoint slides to organize materials and display important topics from the lesson. I observed Dr. Taylor and Dr. Meyers utilizing PowerPoint. Throughout the interview both participants acknowledged a strong desire for students to have an engaging experience in their classroom, however, from my observation it appeared that the use of PowerPoint may hinder the ability to for create an engaging environment. In Dr. Taylor's classroom, the setting was dark with limited lighting and, the PowerPoint slides were the brightest light in the room making them the focus of attention for the students. During lectures the slides were valuable, but during discussions students remained focused on the slides instead of engaging in the conversation. Similarly, Dr. Meyers class used PowerPoint to focus students' attention, but because of extensive text on each slide students I observed students taking notes from the slide instead of participating in the discussion. The use of PowerPoint may have hindered student involvement in discussion because students focused on the screen more than the professor.

Each of the participants in this study taught in large auditorium classrooms. Even in classrooms ranging from 50 to over 200 students, participants recognized

that to encourage students actively participate in their learning it is important to know them. Dr. Smith makes significant efforts to learn the students' names early in the semester:

> By the time first or second day of class and I look at the roll. We have the regular roll, but then we have picture roll. The thing with the pic roll is that it has everyone's major underneath their name. It's for me, really helpful to know how many students are going into STEM fields and how many of them are taking the course because they just have too.

To actively involve students in the learning process Dr. Meyers makes a specific effort to learn students' names as early as possible:

> I make it a point to learn as many names as possible. So that, not only can I talk to them in class; they are always a little shocked when I know their names, but I also, when I see them on campus, I'll call them by name. It is so funny because they act like "oh gosh she knows my name!" More participation and I think ultimately the outcome is that they are, if they know I know who they are. It isn't impersonal anymore. We already have a relationship because I know their name and they know mine. So maybe there is more of a sense of, what's the word I'm looking for, they are on the hook.

Knowing student names and being able to put a face with the name allowed each participant to call on students during classroom discussions and engage them in the learning process. Learning students' names in such a large classroom requires significant time and effort, but participants in this study have found it be a useful strategy for actively engaging students in the learning process. During my observation, I witnessed several participants calling students by name or relating examples back to the experiences of students.

Each of the actions described by the participants was intended to help students to actively participate in the learning process. The participants in this study have learned from their teaching experience that students are more successful if they are encouraged to actively participate in their learning through engaging in

classroom discussions with the faculty member and other students.

Provide Opportunities for Student-to-Student Interaction

As another classroom strategy participants encouraged students to interact with each other to promote classroom discussion. Dr. Meyers made deliberate attempts to create dialogue by presenting an idea or principle and then asking questions. "I'll show them some slides. But then a lot of times I just talk. Then I will ask them questions." As I observed in her classroom, Dr. Meyers masterfully weaved new principles and lessons with questions that prompted students to engage with her and other students in the conversation. Students became involved in the discussion because of Dr. Meyers' specific efforts.

In an effort to connect students with each other, Dr. Smith dedicated time during class to encourage students to interact. "First day of class I make them introduce themselves to three people and then the next day of class I tell them to go sit somewhere else and introduce them to three new people." Dr. Smith encouraged students to connect so that they feel more comfortable interacting with one another and develop networks of friends to potentially increase their comfort level and participation. To encourage interaction between students, Dr. Meyers frequently arrange for groups of her students to meet and interact with each other outside of the classroom engaging opportunities such as trips to the special collections at the University library and downtown historical sites. After participating in these opportunities, Dr. Meyers found that students were more likely to interact with one another in the classroom.

Similarly, Dr. Jones encouraged students to interact with each other by giving them a problem worksheet to complete as a group:

> That's the most simple way to do it, to full blown, print out a worksheet and say get into groups and do this problem and I'm going to walk around and look at your work. I'm going to look at what you produce, not what I produce on the board. I'm yammering away up there, rather than doing that kind of thing is actually go down and watch what the students are producing and then of course when you are talking to them you are talking to them about what they are doing, not what the instructor is doing.

With the right set up and direction Dr. Jones creates an environment where students are expected to interact with him and each other.

Beyond promoting interaction solely within the classroom, Dr. Smith encouraged students to further connect with each other and the institution. She made specific efforts, "to tell them [students] about things that are happening on campus. To find things, I make the stupid announcements that help to connect them. I try really hard to listen to what they say about themselves personally and then refer back to it." Once Dr. Smith discovers more about the interests of students in her class she tries to connect them with other students as well as events and activities on campus.

Creating a classroom where students frequently interact with the material, faculty, and other students can have a positive impact on student persistence decisions (Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt 2008; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). The participants in this study created interactive classrooms to involve students in their own educational process and thereby improve their overall learning. In addition, from their years of teaching, participants recognized that promoting classroom discussion results in students' having a better experience in their classroom and

learning more.

Clearly Outlining Expectations Positively Impacts Student Learning

Throughout their experience of teaching in higher education, faculty participants have learned that students learn better if they outline clear expectations through discussion in class, provide an updated syllabus throughout the semester, and give prompt feedback on completed assignments.

Providing Clear Expectations Improves Students' Experience in the Classroom

The participants in this study found that providing students with a clear idea of what the faculty member expects for upcoming assignments and tests helps them successfully navigate the course. I observed Dr. Taylor spending the last 5 minutes of the class outlining his expectations for an upcoming assignment, using three separate PowerPoint slides explaining the details. He described why he takes time to clearly explain assignments:

> I'm a big fan of very structured courses and so I tend to have very detailed syllabi and here is what is happening this day, here is what is due, here is what you should be thinking about and getting ready for. A typical day in the course is, I spend a few minutes on what I call bookkeeping, the management as far as here is what is happening this week. Here is what is happening in your lab, here is what we are going to talk about today, and here is how it connects to an umbrella of assessments that are going to happen in the class.

Structuring the class to allow 3 to 5 minutes for "bookkeeping" gave Dr. Taylor the opportunity to answer questions and clarify expectations. Dr. Smith structured her course in a similar way: "I do try to keep a clear structure for the class and answer

their homework questions and answer their emails, I give them a review that looks parallel to what their test would be." She acknowledged structuring her class this way to help her students successfully navigate the course.

Dr. Taylor noted that his motivation behind clearly outlining expectations had little to do with student retention:

> It's honestly something I do because it makes me more effective of an instructor by providing clearly mapped out course guidelines… I do think that it creates a lot more equity and fairness in the relationship when something goes wrong for a student to say, "Here are the very clear expectations, I don't want you to guess or think I'm playing hard ball in terms of what it is I want from you."

According to Dr. Taylor, providing clear expectations eliminates potential confusion for his students. In my observation, Dr. Taylor took several minutes at the beginning of the class to recap the previous lesson and review important points on an upcoming exam. In addition, he took time at the end of the class to clarify expectations on an upcoming class assignment. Students were given the opportunity to ask questions related to the expectations for the assignment. Dr. Taylor wanted to make students aware of anticipated outcomes up front so that they know what is expected and can successfully navigate his course.

To improve learning and to reduce confusion, these 2 participants described making specific efforts to provide clear expectations on upcoming assignments. Instead of simply handing students the syllabus at the beginning of the semester and expecting them to follow the outline and assignment descriptions, several participants made time throughout the semester to clearly explain and update students about their expectations on upcoming assignments.

Students Receive Prompt Feedback

In addition to making expectations clear, participants found value in providing prompt feedback on students' assignments and examinations. Dr. Smith ensures her students receive feedback on their assignments in a timely manner. She noted, "I think it's super important that kids know as quickly as possible how they did." After the students take an examination, she tries to have it graded the same day: "I get started and it usually takes about 4 or 5 hours to get the examinations done." With the help of her TAs Dr. Smith provides students with feedback on their tests within 24 hours. Once graded, completed assignments are left at the front of the class for students to pick up and review before the next class. Dr. Smith tracks the tests that are not picked up: "the kids that pick up their tests are at least one point higher (on subsequent tests) then the ones that don't." From her experience, Dr. Smith recognizes the value in providing prompt feedback and clear expectations to give her students the best chance at success in her course.

To ensure students understand their current standing in her course, Dr. Meyers also delivers prompt feedback on assignments: "I'm pretty fast. I try to get it back in a week." She noted that even with larger classes she quickly returns assignments to students; she calls herself a "grading machine." Dr. Meyers' motivation behind the effort to expedite grading is to give students an update on their progress throughout the course. When students receive prompt feedback on assignments they are given frequent checks on their standing in the class. For these 2 participants, they hoped that through providing clear expectations and prompt feedback students would be more likely to succeed in their classes.

Findings Summary

After analyzing the interview transcriptions and observation notes I learned that the participants in this study understand that student retention is important and that they recognize that what they do has an impact on students' persistence decisions; however, this knowledge does not motivate their approach to teaching. The primary motivation behind their approach to teaching was increasing student learning and the overall success of the student. The specific strategies used by participants in their teaching (i.e., active learning, student interaction, providing clear expectations and, ensuring prompt feedback on assignments) were not implemented out of a desire to improve retention; rather, participants utilized them because throughout their years of teaching they found that these strategies facilitated the development of a quality-learning environment and promoted overall student success.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Research findings from this study shed light on how the faculty participants think about and respond to the role they play in student persistence decisions and how that role influences their approach to teaching. Each participant in this study expressed a desire for students to effectively learn course materials and be successful in their educational pursuits. This study adds two outcomes to the current understanding of faculty and their role in student retention. First, many conversations surrounding student retention specifically, within student affairs, talk about retention as a responsibility within student affairs, almost as if faculty are apathetic to the success of students. In my own professional student affairs experience I have witnessed conversations where faculty were intentionally not included because of a perceived aversion to student retention on behalf of the faculty. The findings from this study contradict this assumption. The participants in this study were far from apathetic; rather, they thought deeply about how to ensure students learn effectively and have future success as a result of participating in their classes. Second, this study opens the door to an alternative conversation regarding the role of faculty in student retention. These results challenge current retention conversations and potentially shift the conversation from retention to student

learning as an effort to improve student success and retention. This conversation could take place with the faculty and/or within student affairs meetings where the goal is to identify strategies to improve the experience of students in the classroom. This chapter ties previous research to this study's key findings.

Key Findings

As I began this study I set out to understand whether the participants were influenced by the extensive research that has illustrated their integral role in student persistence decisions (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Braxton, 2008; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt, 2008; Schreiner, 2011). After interviews and classroom observations with each participant, it was clear that student retention did not influence the strategies they implemented in and out of the classroom. However, although these faculty were not influenced by a knowledge and/or understanding of student retention research, each participant approached their teaching with a desire to positively influence student learning. Overall, participants were motivated to improve their teaching to increase student learning and enhance the student experience in their classroom. Key findings discussed in this chapter include: 1) faculty role in student persistence decisions; 2) how and why faculty teach; and 3) what faculty do impacts student persistence decisions. First, faculty in this study were aware of previous research that found that they play an important role in retaining students. However, they acknowledged that their knowledge of their role in retention did not influence how they approach their teaching; student success was their motivation. Second, participants in this study pursued teaching out of a desire to influence students' lives. In order to influence students each participant

adopted a style of teaching, which they have found to improve student learning in their courses. Third, participants have found that by adopting certain teaching and interaction strategies, they have a more positive influence on their students.

Faculty Role in Student Persistence Decisions

Previous studies found that teaching styles, faculty-student interactions, and classroom climate play a crucial role in determining whether a student decides to continue in their postsecondary education pursuits (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Braxton, 2008; Chang, 2005; Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt, 2008; Schreiner, 2011). The participants in this study were aware of their role in retaining students; however their perceptions of this role did not influence how they approached teaching or interacting with students. This is contrary to Barefoot's (2004) suggestion that many faculty are unaware of retention research. The participants in this study were familiar with some retention literature, which confirmed their important role. They did not have an extensive knowledge of the research, but they understood that their teaching impacts student persistence decisions. However, from my interviews and observations it was apparent that participants understand that certain teaching strategies have a more positive impact on student learning than others, not because they understand retention literature, but because they have found these strategies to be beneficial through years of trial and error in their own classrooms (Feldman & Paulsen, 1999). The motivation behind their approach to teaching was rooted in their own desire to ensure that students learn effectively and can transfer knowledge to future courses and life choices.

The primary motivation behind participants' approach to teaching is a desire for students to have a good experience in the classroom and, as faculty, to have a positive impact on student learning. These participants do not have an aversion to student retention. A common thread across each interview and observation is that these participants want students to learn (Kuh & Hu, 2001). As Feldman and Paulsen (1999) found, faculty are motivated to achieve instructional excellence. To accomplish this, the participants in this study seek to provide opportunities for students to actively interact with one another and to thoughtfully integrate course material into their academic and personal lives, which has been found to be an effective way to improve student learning (Braxton et al., 2008; Keeling, 2004; Tinto, 2006). Although participants do not specifically tie their approach to teaching to a knowledge of previous retention related literature, it is apparent that this neglect is not an intentional slight towards the retention research. Rather, they concentrate their approach to teaching in a way they have found to be effective throughout their teaching experience. Their strategies align with strategies found to improve student experiences and overall success (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).

How and Why Faculty Teach

The participants in this study discussed pursuing teaching out of a desire to influence the lives of students. They recognize that they do play an important role in students' perceptions of their ability to be successful. This aligns with previous research which found that faculty play an important role in conveying expectations to students related to their ability to be successful (Tauber, 1997; as cited in Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004). Faculty set the tone for the institution, by

demonstrating expectations and positively influencing students' desire to persist (Kuh et al., 2008). Motivations that influenced the teaching approach of the participants in this study were positively *promoting student learning* and *increasing the likelihood that students will be successful in future classes.*

Promote Student Learning

Participants were thoughtful about how their approach to teaching impacted student learning and students' overall experience in the classroom. Ensuring that students learn the material is the most influential motivator for participants in this study. This is consistent with recent research findings that found the most powerful motivator for faculty is watching students learn (Martson, 2010). Throughout their years of teaching, the participants in this study discovered approaches to teaching that have positive impacts on student learning including: actively involving the students in classroom discussions, providing opportunities for students to interact with one another, and helping students connect course content to their own lives (Astin, 1993; Braxton & Mclendon, 2000; Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt, 2008; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Recognizing the specific role they play in student retention is not a significant motivator impacting their approach to teaching. Rather, participants were motivated to approach their teaching utilizing strategies that they found positively influenced student learning.

Increase the Likelihood the Student Will Continue to Be Successful in Their Future Classes

The findings from this study are consistent with previous research which found that students feel a stronger sense of commitment to their education and the institution when they have the opportunity to interact with faculty and experience effective teaching (Berger & Milem, 1999; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Morrow & Ackerman, 2012). Although the participants in this study did not label their efforts and motivation as student retention, the desire they have for students to not only successfully complete their class, but also to successfully continue their education is paralleled to the concept of student retention (Braxton, Brier & Steele, 2008). In other words, the participants in this study did not characterize their efforts as student retention, but they did acknowledge a strong desire for students to successfully complete their course and move on to success in future courses, which leads to increased retention (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).

What Faculty Do Impacts Student Persistence Decisions

Even if student retention does not motivate participants to approach teaching in a certain way, the way they teach and the strategies they use can have a positive or a negative impact on the persistence decisions and overall success of students (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). What faculty do does matter (Tinto, 1997). The participants in this study understand that their teaching has an impact on students in their classroom. This finding is consistent with the results of previous research, which found that how faculty teach and interact with students influences students' persistence decisions (Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt 2008). The

two common teaching strategies utilized by participants in this study to improve learning were: *connecting with students* through classroom discussion and involvement with themselves and other students; and *providing clear expectations and prompt feedback* to students.

Connecting with Students

Previous research found that faculty and student connections and interactions influence student persistence decisions (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Schreiner et al., 2011). Research findings suggested specific approaches to teaching used by faculty include encouraging students to interact with one another and providing cues to students about how responsive faculty will be to interactions inside and outside the classroom (Cotton & Wilson, 2006). Participants in this study demonstrated optimal teaching styles by "implementing active learning practices—class discussion and higher-order thinking activities—in their teaching" (Braxton & McClendon, p. 63), and utilized specific strategies that involve students in classroom discussion including interacting with them and encouraging their interaction with other students.

Tinto (1997) suggested that involvement on campus influences students' persistence decisions. Specifically, of all the integration opportunities "academic—integration is the most important because the classroom allows students to develop a network of support—a small supportive community of peers—that helps bond students to the broader social communities of the college" (p. 613). Connections between students are not the only form of integration participants in this study focused their attention on. They made attempts to personally connect with students

during each class period, and outside of the classroom. Participants recognized that connecting with students provides them with a strong network within their classroom; a place where students feel they can be successful and where they can connect the information learned with their personal and professional lives and future career pursuits (Komarraju, Musulki, & Bhattacharya, 2010). Throughout their years of teaching, the participants in this study recognized that when they connected with students, the students demonstrated increased learning and had a better classroom experience.

The findings from this study are consistent with findings from previous research, which found that connections between faculty and students positively impact student learning. Umbach and Wawrzynski found that "students report higher levels of engagement and learning at institutions where faculty members use active and collaborative learning techniques, engage students, emphasize higher-order cognitive activities, interact with students and value enriching educational experiences" (2005, p. 2). The participants in this study found that their students are more likely to successfully navigate their course and continue to progress through their future educational pursuits when they, as teachers, take the time to provide opportunities for interaction with their students.

Providing Clear Expectations and Prompt Feedback

In addition to creating an interactive classroom and connecting with students, participants positively influenced student persistence decisions by clearly outlining expectations and providing prompt feedback. Research has found that clearly outlining the expectations and outcomes for courses can increase students'

persistence (Pascarella et al., 2008). This finding is consistent with the experience of faculty participants in this study who have discovered that students have a better experience in their classroom if they provide a detailed syllabus and promptly return assignments with appropriate feedback. In addition to improving the classroom experience, participants found that students performed better on assignments if they reviewed course expectations multiple times.

A recent study of effective instruction, faculty teaching, and student persistence found that exposure to organized and clear instruction during the first year of college increases the likelihood that students will be "very satisfied" with their undergraduate education. In turn, this satisfaction has a net positive influence on the likelihood they will re-enroll for the second year of undergraduate education at an institution (Pascarella et al., 2008). Participants in this study have learned from their teaching experience that students learn better and are more satisfied with their education when they provide clear expectations and prompt feedback. This finding is consistent with previous research, which found that access to effective teacher organization and clarity improves student learning during the first year of college (Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Braxton, Milem, & Shaw, 2000; Colton & Wilson, 2006; Kuh et al., 2008; Pascarella, 1996).

Although participants make efforts to clearly explain expectations they also recognize that in such large classrooms students must be responsible for their own education. When students are confused or are looking for further clarification, participants expect that they will take the time to inquire from other students, TAs, or the faculty members themselves. In order to effectively impact student

experiences and thereby student success, participants in this study establish teaching and discussion strategies that encourage students to engage within the classroom through asking questions, understanding expectations and interacting with other students and the faculty member. This finding is consistent with previous ideas from researchers (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006) suggesting that students achieve when they develop a strong sense of responsibility for their education.

Contract vs. Tenure Track Faculty

Of the participants in this study, 1 was tenured, 1 was on the tenure track and 2 were full-time contract faculty. Although the responsibilities and workloads vary by the faculty level of the participants in this study, the results demonstrate a consistent desire to be an effective teacher regardless of faculty contract. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which found that full-time contract faculty approach teaching in a way that is similar to tenured faculty (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011). There was no obvious difference between how each participant in this study, contract, tenure track, or tenured, approached teaching.

Different expectations exist for contract, tenure-track, and tenured faculty (AAUP, 2014). Tenured and tenure-track faculty are required to maintain certain responsibilities and fulfill expectations for the department and institution including, teaching, research, and service (Terpstra & Honoree, 2009). The expectation for many contract faculty is different in that these faculty may not be expected to conduct research, attend department trainings or meetings, or hold regular office hours. (AAUP, 2014). The contract faculty participants in this study did not discuss

attending department meetings but each of them did acknowledge holding regular office hours. The only apparent difference between the participants in this study was that the tenured and tenure-track faculty both mentioned a desire and responsibility to conduct research, while only 1 of the contract faculty members mentioned a desire to conduct research related to his personal and departmental agenda. The expectations for service and research are different for contract faculty (AAUP, 2014), but in this study their desire to be effective teachers did not differ from their tenured or tenure track colleagues.

Significance

Based on the research cited in the literature review, it is evident that faculty play a significant role in influencing student success when they use teaching and involvement strategies that allow students to connect to the institution, faculty, and student peers. Given this context, this study is important for several reasons. First, the majority of retention research involving faculty has been conducted using quantitative research methodologies. Qualitative methodology in this study allowed for an in-depth examination of the lived experiences of faculty. As Marshall and Rossman (1999) recommended, "one cannot understand human actions without understanding the meaning that participants attribute to those actions—their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptive worlds; the researcher therefore, needs to understand the deeper perspectives captured through face-to-face interaction" (p. 57). Through participant interviews, I gained an understanding of how participants approach teaching and interacting with students in order to improve their learning experience. Understanding the lived experience of faculty

was helpful when evaluating how participants perceive their role in retaining students.

Second, this study fills a gap in the research by yielding valuable information for campus administrators, faculty, department leaders, and student affairs professionals in discussions about implementing strategies to improve retention as well as strategies that have not been effective. A recent investigation (Komarraju, Muliskin, & Bhattacharya, 2010) of the impact faculty and student interactions have on student achievement found that although faculty play a crucial role in student achievement, the majority of research was investigated from the student perspective. Komarraju, Muliskin, and Bhattacharya (2010) suggested that additional research should be conducted from the faculty perspective, and further recommended "investigating how faculty members view their interactions with students and what they find enjoyable and beneficial from such relationships" (p. 340). In order to effectively involve faculty in strategies to improve student success, it is important to understand their current perceptions of the role they play, and what successful classroom strategies they have implemented to improve the student learning experience. The findings of this study provide higher education practitioners with additional information about the faculty role in ensuring the classroom is a place where students can be successful.

Implications and Recommendations

Findings from this study provide valuable data related to what motivates faculty to teach and interact with students to have a positive impact on student experiences. Previous research has already determined which teaching strategies

and interactions promote student retention and success including: active learning (Braxton & McClendon, 2001); interaction with students (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005); and, providing clear expectations and prompt feedback (Pascarella et al., 2008). Understanding how faculty interpret their role in student retention and success, based on the findings from previous research, provides an important foundation for academic and student affairs professionals interested in improving student success at their college or university (Berger & Milem, 1999; Nora & Crisp, 2012; Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996).

Recommendations for Academic and Student Affairs

The results of this study indicate that the participants are committed to student learning and teaching as a way to improve learning in their classroom (Martson, 2010; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Although the participants in this study are not motivated by their perceived role in student retention, they are not unaware of their important role in influencing student experiences through their teaching and interactions (Tauber, 1997; as cited in Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004, p. 550). I approached this study, like many student affairs professionals, assuming that faculty were unaware of their important role in retention. I found the contrary. The findings from this study have several implications for different areas of higher education. Specifically, this study sheds light on the possibility that the assumptions held by student affairs regarding faculty and their role in student retention may be wrong. Research is clear that both faculty (academic affairs) and staff (student affairs) play a significant role in student persistence decisions (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005, p. 6). However, the conversation, and approach to the

conversation, between each division varies, which impacts how policy is developed. Specific implications for each division are presented below.

Recommendations for Student Affairs

Within student affairs, the conversation surrounding student retention and success frequently revolves around what faculty can or should implement in their classrooms and how they should interact with students to influence student persistence decisions (Kuh, 2008). From my experience, student affairs professionals frequently develop programs and partnerships with academic departments in an attempt to "teach" faculty how they can positively impact student success. This study's participants are not disconnected from the student experience or retention literature. Rather, they want students to have successful learning experiences and move on to other courses and ultimately careers. What may be perceived by some staff as indifference on the part of faculty is most likely a misunderstanding between the two groups. The results of this study confirm that in reality, participants are not indifferent when it comes to retention; they have a strong desire to influence student persistence decisions by teaching in a way that ensures students have a quality experience and can successfully advance through their degree requirements. Student affairs professionals can influence student success by making efforts to be aware of the strategies used by faculty to promote student success and recognize those as an important aspect of the institution's retention efforts (Blake, 2007). By observing faculty teaching and interacting with students in the classroom, student affairs professionals can see first-hand the efforts faculty make to teach effectively and positively impact student persistence

decisions.

Another finding that can influence student affairs is the information related to how faculty perceive their role in student retention and how student affairs staff communicate with faculty regarding that role. Faculty participants in this study are motivated by a strong desire to influence student learning by ensuring a quality experience in their classroom (Feldman & Paulsen, 1999). Student affairs professionals are motivated by a desire to create a social and intellectual environment on campus through programs and other offerings outside of the classroom that improve the student experience (Blake, 2007). The two may be talking past each other related to how their roles are defined. If a student affairs professional wants to "teach" a faculty member about the important role they play in retaining students, the conversation may not be very productive and the student affairs professional may walk away feeling frustration towards the faculty member. It is unfair for faculty to assume that student affairs should be fully responsible for student retention and success (Tinto, 1997). Likewise, it is unreasonable for student affairs professionals to assume that faculty members are averse to making an effort to retain students (Barefoot, 2004). By simply reframing the dialogue from roles to strategies, student affairs divisions can be much more effective in positively impacting student persistence decisions. This starts with conversations across the campus where student affairs professionals seek to first understand the strategies used by faculty rather than assigning roles and responsibilities to them. Another suggestion is for student affairs to develop a campus-wide survey of faculty to understand how they approach their teaching. Once a foundation of teaching has

been established, student affairs staff can then work to support faculty and align their efforts to improve student retention across campus (Blake, 2007).

Recommendations for Academic Affairs

Faculty teaching in higher education have many other responsibilities. Student retention is often not on their radar (Barefoot, 2004). When student retention is discussed, it is frequently framed as the responsibility of the student affairs division (Tinto, 1997). Faculty have the responsibility to teach, research, advise students, and serve on committees across the campus (SIGCSE, 2011). Because of their extensive responsibilities, faculty may not be interested in or focused on student retention (Tinto, 2006). The findings from this study illustrate that participants are not opposed to contributing to student success; however, the way retention is viewed through the lens of student affairs may not be the same way faculty view retention. Participants in this study were not averse to the idea of student retention; however, their own approach to teaching was not influenced by student retention research. Rather, they were influenced by a strong desire for students to learn the course material and be successful. Although the motivation for their approach was primarily student learning, research has found that higher levels of learning positively impact student retention (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Without a specific motivation to retain students, faculty may still have a positive impact on student success through their consistent focus on improving their own teaching to improve student learning.

This study's participants are very interested in ensuring students learn effectively and can demonstrate how course material can be useful in their personal

lives. The findings from this study may shed light on the possibility of positively influencing student success by focusing faculty attention on improving the classroom experience and learning (Braxton, 2008; Kuh, 2001; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). This finding is consistent with research that supports the notion of institutions focusing on improving teaching as a strategy for increasing retention and success (Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000).

One suggestion to assist academic affairs professionals and faculty improving teaching and learning outcomes as a strategy to improve retention is providing faculty with professional development opportunities to observe other faculty who embrace effective teaching strategies. This could be made possible as department leaders identify faculty who have shown a commitment to teaching effectively and team them up with faculty who are new to the department. Second, academic departments can develop department-specific recognition opportunities for faculty who embrace effective teaching strategies and tie them to retention, tenure, and promotion structures that are likely to favor research over effective teaching (Lechuga & Lechuga, 2012). As demonstrated by the participants in this study, involving students in classroom discussion, applying course materials to students' lives, and providing clear expectations and prompt feedback does not require considerably more time or preparation; rather, participants integrated these practices into their core approach to teaching students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should explore the perceived role faculty play in student success on a larger scale. The findings from this study are intriguing enough to garner interest in a large scale study of faculty via a comprehensive survey across institutional types. The findings from this study show that the participants do understand their role in student retention, but that role does not motivate their approach to teaching. Rather they are motivated to improve their teaching out of a desire to constantly increase student learning and success in their classes. A small sample size impacts the broad generalizability of these findings. However, the findings are intriguing and represent a potential wealth of information for institutions interested in improving student retention and overall student success. The next phase of research will need to be large enough to generalize across colleges and universities of all sizes including a more diverse sample of faculty. A quantitative survey over several different institutional types including Research I, teaching, community college, private, and public would be broad enough to provide the foundation for future research efforts.

Finally, the results of this study would be strengthened by an evaluation of student experiences. In classrooms where faculty are motivated by student success, it would be interesting to validate the faculty members' motivation and approach to teaching with the experience of students. To enhance the findings of future studies, students in the classrooms of each of these faculty members could be interviewed to gather information related to their experience in the classroom. The student experience obtained through interviews could support the use of intentional efforts

made by the faculty to improve learning and provide faculty members with valuable information related to how students respond to their teaching approaches.

Conclusion

Entering the complex world of faculty and the classroom is useful to truly understand how faculty perceive their role in the important work of teaching students and providing the best environment for retaining students and impacting their overall success (Seidman, 2006). Faculty need to be involved in understanding how to improve student success (Braxton, 2001; Braustein & McGrath, 1997). They are in a unique position to implement classroom and teaching practices that directly impact students (Umbach & Wawrzybski, 2005). How faculty perceive their role in student experiences is important to understand because they play essential roles in student success (Astin, 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella, 2001; Tinto, 1975). The results of this study provide valuable information to assist colleges and universities as they contemplate strategies for improving the retention of students by focusing on the classroom, faculty, and overall learning. Nora (2002) argued that in order for colleges and universities to develop and promote strategies to improve student success, "the burden of providing a definitive plan of action for immediate student 'success' should involve both the researcher and those administrators, practitioners, faculty, and staff who are necessary to link what the data are indicating to the most appropriate action to be taken on the specific campus" (p. 69). Involving faculty and the classroom in student success conversations is important for enhancing any campus wide retention strategy. From the experiences of participants in this study, it is clear that faculty are not

oblivious to retention, nor are they uncooperative or disinterested in student success. Rather, they are interested in student learning and students' successful advancement through future classes and on to careers. This finding provides an important starting point when faculty and staff discuss strategies for improving student retention by focusing on learning in the classroom. Involving faculty in the conversation and focusing the dialogue on student learning can lead to improved student success and increased retention.

APPENDIX A

DEPARTMENT CHAIR RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear *respondent*,

My name is Andrew Stone; I am a Doctoral student at the University of Utah in the Educational Leadership and Policy department. I am in the process of recruiting faculty to participate in my dissertation study. I am conducting a study to investigate how faculty at the University of Utah understand the role they play in retaining students. Numerous studies have found that teaching styles, curriculum development, and classroom climate play a crucial role in determining whether or not some students decide to continue postsecondary education. Through this study I hope to explore how faculty internalize their role in student retention.

I am looking to recruit several faculty who will agree to be interviewed twice for my study. Each interview will be followed by one observation of an actual teaching setting in your classroom. I am interesting in your perspective and experience as a tenured or tenure-track faculty teaching at the University of Utah. I estimate that it will take approximately 60 minutes to complete the first interview and 45 minutes for the second interview.

If you are willing to participate I would appreciate your response by ….

Your input is very important to me and will be kept strictly confidential (used only for the purposes of research for this project). If you are interested, I would be happy to share my findings and final report.

If you have any questions please call me at 801.830.8057 or email me at stonead@gmail.com

Sincerely,

Andrew Stone
Doctoral Student
University of Utah
801.830.8057
stonead@gmail.com

APPENDIX B

FACULTY RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear *respondent*,

My name is Andrew Stone; I am a Doctoral student at the University of Utah in the Educational Leadership and Policy department. I am in the process of recruiting faculty to participate in my dissertation study. I am conducting a study to investigate how faculty at the University of Utah understand the role they play in retaining students. Numerous studies have found that teaching styles, curriculum development, and classroom climate play a crucial role in determining whether or not some students decide to continue postsecondary education. Through this study I hope to explore how faculty internalize their role in student retention.

I am looking to recruit several faculty who will agree to be interviewed twice for my study. Each interview will be followed by one observation of an actual teaching setting in your classroom. I am interesting in your perspective and experience as a tenured or tenure-track faculty teaching at the University of Utah. I estimate that it will take approximately 60 minutes to complete the first interview and 45 minutes for the second interview.

If you are willing to participate I would appreciate your response by ….

Your input is very important to me and will be kept strictly confidential (used only for the purposes of research for this project). If you are interested, I would be happy to share my findings and final report.

If you have any questions please call me at 801.830.8057 or email me at stonead@gmail.com

Sincerely,

Andrew Stone
Doctoral Student
University of Utah
801.830.8057
stonead@gmail.com

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

BACKGROUND
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you want to volunteer to take part in this study.

The purpose of the study is to investigate how higher education faculty members interpret the role they play in retaining students. Numerous studies have found that individual faculty, teaching styles, curriculum development, and classroom climate play a pivotal role in determining whether or not a student decides to continue postsecondary education pursuits. This study will explore what faculty members know about the retention research, their interpretation of the retention research findings regarding faculty, and how they apply what they understand to improve their teaching practice. This research will supplement the literature on the role faculty members play in retaining students.

STUDY PROCEDURE
It will take approximately 60 minutes to complete the interview. As part of this study you will be asked to take part in a one-on-one interview. Questions will be asked about how you internalize and apply the role you play in retaining students. Specific questions will be asked about your knowledge of literature related to student retention, best practices for curriculum development and teaching, and if/how you incorporate the best practices in your classroom.

RISKS
The risks of this study are minimal. You may feel uncomfortable thinking about or talking about information related to your teaching and scholarship. These risks are similar to those you experience when discussing personal information with others. If you feel upset from this experience you can tell me, and I will tell you about resources available to help.

BENEFITS
I cannot promise any direct benefits for taking part in this study. However, possible benefits include an increased understanding of how improving retention is processed and implemented on campus and in the classroom. This study will supplement the research that indicates faculty play an important role in retaining students. Additional research has also found certain teaching styles and classroom climate to be important in retaining students. The results of the study will assist Academic Affairs as they develop professional development and faculty training for incoming faculty.

CONFIDENTIALITY
I will keep all research records that identify you private to the extent allowed by law. Records about you will be saved on a computer with password protection. Only those who work with this study will be allowed access to your information. Your

name and identifiable titles will be kept with your responses from the interview. In publication, your name will be protected.

PERSON TO CONTACT
If you have questions, complaints, or concerns about this study, you can contact Andrew Stone at 801.830.8057. If you feel you have been harmed as a result of participation, please email Amy Bergerson- amy.bergerson@utah.edu

Institutional Review Board: Contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant. Also, contact the IRB if you have questions, complaints or concerns which you do not feel you can discuss with the investigator. The University of Utah IRB may be reached by phone at (801) 581-3655.

Research Participant Advocate: You may also contact the Research Participant Advocate (RPA) by phone at (801) 581-3803 or by email at.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
It is up to you to decide whether to take part in this study. Refusal to participate or the decision to withdraw from this research will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. This will not affect your relationship with the investigator.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION TO PARTICIPANTS
There is no compensation or costs associated with participation in this interview.

CONSENT
By signing this consent form, I confirm I have read the information in this consent form and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I will be given a signed copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

_____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

_____ _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviewer: Andrew Stone Date: _____

Interviewee: _____ School: University of Utah

Pre-Interview Notes:
Interviews will be conducted at the University of Utah. Participants will be recruited from the English, Mathematics, Biology, Social Science, Ethnic Studies, and History departments. Interviews will take place in the office, or location designated by the interview participant.

Introduction and Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to investigate the motivation why faculty approach teaching the way that they do. Specifically, what methods of teaching do they utilize in the classroom and why are those methods utilized. To determine their motivation and approach to teaching I will inquire about their experience as a student, early teaching and research endeavors to understand their motivation to the teaching strategies they use in the classroom. Numerous studies have found that teaching styles, curriculum development, and classroom climate play a crucial role in determining whether or not students decide to continue postsecondary education pursuits (Astin, 1993; Bean & Eaton, 2001; Braxton, 2008; Chang, 2005; Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt 2008; Schreiner 2011; Umbach & Wawrzynski 2005). Understanding specific teaching strategies as well as how and why faculty interact with students in and out of the classroom will be goal of this study.

Background:
Significant research has found that faculty and staff play an important role in building a positive campus climate, promoting engagement, and valuing diversity. Faculty set the tone for the institution. One study found, "faculty and staff interactions with students may be predictive of student learning because of the expectations conveyed to students about their ability to succeed—a self-fulfilling prophecy that influences students to achieve in ways that confirm those expectations" (Tauber, 1997). Successful integration on campus is significantly influenced by "favorable daily interactions between faculty and staff" (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Faculty play an important role in explaining and demonstrating institutional values and expectations (Kuh, et. al., 2008). This should be done early and frequently, in the classroom and outside of the classroom. Vincent Tinto (1998) suggests that of all involvement, academic integration (and involvement) seems to be the most important. Although academic involvement may be the most beneficial, Tinto further suggests, "that academic and social integration influence persistence in separate ways for different students… Individuals are more likely to persist when both forms (academic and social) of integration occur."

Given the overwhelming research supporting the role of faculty in retaining students, through their practice in and out of the classroom, this study will fill a void

in the research by specifically linking research findings with faculty understanding and application.

Confidentiality Statement:
I will keep all research records that identify you private to the extent allowed by law. Records about you will saved on a computer with password protection. Only those who work with this study will be allowed access to your information. Your name and identifiable titles will be kept with your responses from the interview. In publication, your name will be protected.

APPENDIX E

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Interviewer: Andrew Stone Date: _____

Interviewee: _____ School: University of Utah

Pre-observation Notes:
Observations will be conducted at the University of Utah. Participants will be recruited from the English, Mathematics, Biology, Social Science, Ethnic Studies, and History departments. Observations will take place in the classroom of the faculty interview participants. Faculty will determine the course and time for the observation.

Introduction and Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to investigate the motivation why faculty approach teaching the way that they do. Specifically, what methods of teaching do they utilize in the classroom and why are those methods utilized. To determine their motivation and approach to teaching I will inquire about their experience as a student, early teaching and research endeavors to understand their motivation to the teaching strategies they use in the classroom. Numerous studies have found that teaching styles, curriculum development, and classroom climate play a crucial role in determining whether or not students decide to continue postsecondary education pursuits (Astin, 1993; Bean & Eaton, 2001; Braxton, 2008; Chang, 2005; Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt 2008; Schreiner 2011; Umbach & Wawrzynski 2005). Understanding specific teaching strategies as well as how and why faculty interact with students in and out of the classroom will be goal of this study.

Background:
Significant research has found that faculty and staff play an important role in building a positive campus climate, promoting engagement, and valuing diversity. Faculty set the tone for the institution. One study found, "faculty and staff interactions with students may be predictive of student learning because of the expectations conveyed to students about their ability to succeed—a self-fulfilling prophecy that influences students to achieve in ways that confirm those expectations" (Tauber, 1997). Successful integration on campus is significantly influenced by "favorable daily interactions between faculty and staff" (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Faculty play an important role in explaining and demonstrating institutional values and expectations (Kuh, et. al., 2008). This should be done early and frequently, in the classroom and outside of the classroom. Vincent Tinto (1998) suggests that of all involvement, academic integration (and involvement) seems to be the most important. Although academic involvement may be the most beneficial, Tinto further suggests, "that academic and social integration influence persistence in separate ways for different students… Individuals are more likely to persist when both forms (academic and social) of integration occur."

Given the overwhelming research supporting the role of faculty in retaining students, through their practice in and out of the classroom, this study will fill a void in the research by specifically linking research findings with faculty understanding and application.

Confidentiality Statement:
I will keep all research records that identify you private to the extent allowed by law. Records about you will saved on a computer with password protection. Only those who work with this study will be allowed access to your information. The classroom number and other identifiable information such as a course number, will not be included in observation notes. In publication, all identifiable information will be protected.

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Background

1. Tell me about your professional teaching history in higher education?
2. How many years have you been teaching?
3. How many years at the University of Utah?
4. Why did you choose to teach at a research one institution?
    a. What classes have you taught? What classes are you currently teaching?
    b. How many times have you taught this class?
    c. Are these classes you have elected to teach or classes you have been asked to teach?

Approach to teaching and interaction with students

5. What is your philosophy and approach to teaching?
6. What factors have influenced you approach to teaching? (Experience as a student, early years as a teacher, research and study, etc.)
7. What does a typical 50-60 min class look like when you are teaching? Lecture, groupwork, discussion, etc.
8. What motivates you to teach students the way you do?
9. What motivates your interaction with students in and out of the classroom?
10. Do you feel faculty play an important role by interacting with students outside of the classroom?

Approach to student retention

11. How do faculty play a role in retaining students?
12. If yes, how do faculty influence the retention of students?
13. Does the role you play in student retention impact how you approach teaching and curriculum development?

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